

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT

AGING WITH DIGNITY AND INDEPENDENCE

The face of American society is changing with people living longer than ever before. Yet right now our nation lacks a system of care and support that enables older adults to age with dignity, independence, and choice in the face of increasing health and daily needs. Vulnerable older adults need more affordable and accessible options for receiving care and support in their homes, so that they don't have to end up in a nursing home. Fulfilling this need will take unprecedented levels of public involvement, including being engaged in our daily lives, our neighborhoods, our communities, and at the state and federal levels. Here are 10 ways you can help to ensure that a system of care is available for you and your loved ones should you ever need it.

As an individual:

1

Become the new face of aging.

Challenge the negative stereotypes about aging by maintaining an active role in your own community. The notion of a senior retiring to a rocking chair is obsolete. Many of today's seniors played a key role in our nation's most important social movements, from free speech to civil rights, and can transform the system of care for themselves and their loved ones. Resolve to remain active and involved, personally and politically, regardless of your physical abilities.

2

Take charge of how you want to age.

Make a plan for yourself that includes where and how you will live as you grow older. Think about what you might need in your life in case you need daily support. Choose someone you trust to be a surrogate decision-maker who will honor your health care wishes if you cannot make decisions for yourself, and let that person know what you want for your life. Gather a list of important contacts including professionals, family members, friends, and loved ones who can provide support in a time of need. Put this information in an accessible place, such as near the refrigerator or telephone. For suggestions on where to start, see our *Ten Things You Should Know about Aging with Dignity and Independence*.

3

Speak up about the kind of care and treatment that you do or don't want.

Talk with your doctor and your loved ones now about the kind of care you want for yourself. Consider filling out an advance directive or a *Five Wishes* form so that your desires are known and documented. For suggestions on how to talk with your doctor, see our *Ten Conversations to Have with Your Doctor to Promote Aging with Dignity and Independence*. Start having these conversations with your family members and loved ones. See ways to start this dialogue in our *Ten Conversations to Plan for Aging with Dignity and Independence*.

In your neighborhood:

4

Talk to your neighbors, especially if there are older adults who are living nearby.

If you have an older neighbor who lives alone, check in on them from time to time. Find out if they are getting the kind of support and services they need to live well in the community. By recognizing the needs of your older neighbors, you could be a valuable resource and help by connecting them with important services in the community. While this may seem small, this can make a big difference in the life of an older adult.

5

Become a source of knowledge for transforming care where you live.

Reach out to your local *Area Agency on Aging*, senior center, or community center to learn about the kind of services they offer to help a loved one who may need them in the future. Also, public libraries can provide valuable information about local community resources. Share this information with family members and neighbors, so they know they are not alone. For more information about resources and places to start looking, see our *Ten Resources to Help Prepare for Aging with Dignity and Independence*.



In your community:

6 Stand up and be heard.

Find out if there are local organizations where you can express your thoughts, concerns, and experiences about growing older and the need for accessible and affordable support services. Check your local senior or community centers, which often hold meetings to discuss civic issues. If your local civic, religious, or other leaders are not talking about ways to help older people live safe and well in your community, bring it up, find out why, and encourage them to make aging issues a priority.



7 Take a leadership role in getting organized.

Form a community group that is engaged in what is happening in your area. Get your neighbors involved, start a phone tree, or form a local network of people who are interested in working together to make your community livable for all older adults. Consider starting a local dialogue through a town hall meeting or by writing a letter to the editor of your local paper.

At the state and federal level:

8 Find out what your state leaders are doing to improve long-term care.

Find out what is happening in your state, and make your voice heard by talking with current representatives or those wanting your vote. Learn about the *facts and issues facing seniors* in your state and how you can get involved. Many states are facing budget cutbacks and trimming programs that serve seniors in your area. Decisions being made today could change the availability of care you or a loved one may need tomorrow.

9 Stay on top of changes at the federal level as a result of health reform.

While health care and daily support for older people with needs happen at the local level, many programs and services are shaped by decisions made in Washington, D.C. For example, the federal health reform law is moving forward, and allows the government to work better with states and communities on finding new ways of improving the system of long-term care for older adults and people with disabilities. Also, discussions are happening every day in Congress about potential changes to Medicare (health insurance for older people) and Medicaid (health coverage for low-income individuals) that could affect you and your loved ones. Here are links to get contact information for your elected officials in Washington, DC and ways to communicate with them: [Congressional representatives](#), [senators](#), and the [president](#).

In the online community:

10 Harness the power of social media.

Regardless of where you live, social media can be an ideal place to learn about, discuss, and connect with others on issues related to growing older. There is an increasing presence among baby boomers and older adults on the internet, and websites such as Facebook and Twitter can provide a platform to share your voice. A simple search of the term “long-term care” on Twitter or Facebook is a great place to start. Helpful sites on the subject include the New York Times [New Old Age](#) blog, Huffington Post [Huff/Post 50](#), PBS [Next Avenue](#), AARP [Bulletin](#), and the National Institute of Aging [News of Note](#). You can also follow The SCAN Foundation on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



This publication is part of a series produced by The SCAN Foundation titled “Ten Things You Should Know,” designed to help you prepare for aging with dignity and independence. To view the whole series, including Spanish versions, visit www.TheSCANFoundation.org.

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