



South Carolina
**DEPARTMENT
ON AGING**

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Field Hearing with U.S. Senator Tim Scott
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Good morning. I am Connie Munn, and I serve as Director of the South Carolina Department on Aging; it is truly an honor to be with all of you today. Senator Scott, I want to especially thank you for hosting this field hearing, highlighting all of the great progress we are making together as a team here in South Carolina with regard to healthy, vibrant aging.

Throughout the pandemic, the strength of the Aging Network in South Carolina has been tested – and truly showcased. Regional and community partners all across the state have come together in a time of great need, a true testament to the dedication and devotion to those who have a desire to help others when they need it most. While the threat to an older adult’s health and well-being has intensified during the pandemic, longstanding partnerships, as well as new connections, have been vital to the continuation of services for our most vulnerable population.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the South Carolina Department on Aging (SCDOA) and Aging Network immediately observed barriers that seniors faced regarding nutrition, and we began to encourage the use of additional nutritional supports to “fill the gap,” such as providing those in need with bags of groceries or assisting with enrollment in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

One such example is when a senior called the Trident Area Agency on Aging because she desperately needed food. She was caring for her husband, a disabled Veteran who was also going through cancer treatment at a Veterans’ Affairs (VA) facility. This particular senior did not drive and had to walk to get food from the nearest food source, which was a gas station. The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) was able to provide food from their pantry and connect her with Lowcountry Street Grocery to provide a weekly delivery of eggs and fresh produce to an area deemed a “food desert.”

While this is just one example which illustrates that in order to promote healthy, active, and independent lifestyles, community support and services must be provided from a holistic approach. To live a fruitful life, all dimensions must be assessed, and supports should be tailored to the unique needs of a particular individual. This is why a multitude of evidence-based programming has been offered across South Carolina to enrich the lives of older adults, to improve health and well-being, and to reduce disease and injury. The majority of these programs are funded through The Older Americans Act and are directly implemented by aging network providers that have been certified and trained. Additionally, programming is provided in collaboration with other state agencies and university systems utilizing alternate funding sources. Some examples of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) that have been provided in South Carolina include:

- Powerful Tools for Caregivers, which is a caregiver support program
- falls prevention resources such as Fit & Strong and Enhance Fitness

- Clemson University has partnered with the Administration for Community Living (ACL) on a grant to reduce the fall risk in rural, older South Carolinians
- We know diabetes and arthritis are chronic diseases that affect our older South Carolinas and so to combat diseases some programs we offer are Diabetes Self-Management Program and the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program.
- The Trident Area Agency on Aging offers a unique program which highlights a partnership between community and clinical linkages with Roper St. Francis Hospital System for the delivery of the Enhance Fitness program.

The SCDOA established a social isolation/loneliness task force which led to construct supports and resources for those older adults most at risk, which are the rural dwelling, minority, and homebound individuals. Some of the projects in progress include:

- ‘Senior Kits’ – Take-home kits for older adults to enhance emotional, mental, and physical wellness
- iPad loan/management – Through a partnership between S.C. Assistive Technology (part of the University of South Carolina) and participating AAAs

The SCDOA has also been able to form various other partnership projects with federal and state agencies, as well as non-profits, such as the:

- S.C. Nutrition & Health Care Workgroup (‘Food is Medicine’) – The University of South Carolina SNAP-ED initiative convenes state-level healthy eating and health care partners to increase coordination efforts among the various groups on issues such as state-level policy, systems, and environmental change strategies.
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Grant – A \$1.1 million grant recently received by the SCDOA that will encourage vibrant aging and lifestyles by funding minor home modifications for seniors in 29 counties throughout South Carolina, with the help of an in-house Occupational Therapist and regional AAA assessors.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the SCDOA recognizes that wellness is a multi-dimensional measure of overall health, integrating the mind, the body, and the spirit. Regardless of social, economic, or environmental conditions, *all* older adults have the right to health and wellness services. While the Older Americans Act provides many direct programs and services for the promotion of health equity, the SCDOA aims to bridge the gap with those entities who do the same – or similar – work. We believe that this task is best accomplished through coordination, cooperation, and collaboration by partnering with other state agencies, non-profits, health systems, and higher-education institutions to produce positive change for South Carolina’s older adults. Senator Scott, I again thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony before the Committee today, and I am happy to address any questions or concerns that you may have.