

**Project 2015:  
Preparing for the Impact of  
Dynamic Population Change--  
Our Aging and Diverse Population**

Testimony of:

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Project 2015: Planning and Preparing for the Impact of Dynamic Population Change

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## ***Introduction***

Good morning. I am Neal Lane, Director of the New York State Office for the Aging.

Thank you for inviting me to come here today to talk with you about the aging of the baby boom generation. In the United States, the large baby boom cohort has been a dominating factor in shaping our country's demographic profile and our country's social environment . . . and this group will continue in that role. Of the 78 million baby boomers in the United States, 21 million have reached early-retirement age and, by 2015, 38 million boomers will be over the age of 60. By 2024, the entire boomer cohort will be over the age of 60, and their impact will be felt for much of this century.

Among the states across the country, New York ranks third in the number of older people, and this has focused our increasing discussion on both the challenges and the opportunities presented by this segment of the State's population. However, in addition to this aging phenomenon, New York is one of the states whose future demographic and social profile is also being profoundly shaped by additional major demographic trends-- most notably, patterns of immigration, migration, and minority status.

I am pleased to be here to talk about the work that we have been doing in New York State to prepare for these dramatic shifts in our population, and to offer our perspective about this issue for the deliberations that you are engaging in.

While I am going to talk with you about the aging of the baby boomers . . . I ask everyone here to think about the boomers within the larger context of overall dynamic population change. That is what we did in New York State – very successfully – through Project 2015.

In New York, we realized that if we wanted to effectively inform and shape future policy to prepare for the baby boom, we needed to change the paradigm we have traditionally used when considering aging issues. We decided that we needed to expand WHAT it was we looked at . . . and to expand WHO would be involved in doing the looking. Project 2015 is a strategic planning approach that reflects this paradigm shift.

Project 2015 was designed and managed by the New York State Office for the Aging as a very structured, time-limited planning process. It was carried out at the direction of Governor George Pataki and involved 36 New York State cabinet-level agencies acting in concert. This initiative was used to take these very diverse state government agencies through a future-oriented process to analyze demographic projections . . . understand the implications of these trends for their own missions, products, services, and day-to-day work . . . and identify action steps that each would take to respond to these implications. The aim of this planning process was for state government agencies to prepare to effectively meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that are inherent in the aging and increasing diversity of our communities. It is all about good government.

## *How did we change the planning paradigm?*

### First, WHAT we looked at:

We looked at three aspects of the aging of the baby boomers and the implications of their fast becoming the “elder boom”:

- Certainly, the fact that they would create a dramatic increase in the **number of older people**.
- But, also the implications of the major phenomena of **increasing longevity**—that is, the significant growth in the number of people aged 85 and over and aged 100 and over. All subgroups of the population are living longer and longer, including many groups with the various disabilities and impairments who traditionally did not live into old age. In New York, the 85+ population is expected to increase by 34% by 2015, and centenarians will increase by approximately 250%.
- In addition, we became aware of a third aspect related to the aging of the boomers . . . and that is the changing balance we will see between the proportion of our population that is elderly and the proportion that is non-elderly. As we move into the future, we will have a greater proportion of elders and a smaller proportion of non-elders-- and that will have an impact on dependency ratios, availability of caregivers, work force issues, the critical need for supporting intergenerational interdependence, and other issues.

**However**, we also looked at five trends that will significantly increase the diverse nature of our communities— trends that will have an impact on **ALL** age groups and on **ALL** community sectors:

- New York’s continuing strong influx of **foreign immigration**
- Our very robust patterns of **domestic migration**
- Our rapid increases in numbers and types of **ethnic groups**
- The increasing numbers of people with **disabilities**
- And . . . the growing numbers and types of **non-traditional family households**

Considering the impacts of aging AND diversity provides a strong foundation for creating vital, dynamic communities for all residents.

### Second, for our paradigm shift . . . WHO was engaged to do the looking?

For Project 2015, we expanded who was brought to the table to understand and plan for the impact of demographic and social change.

For example, think about who is traditionally invited to tackle aging issues--- do we regularly invite the business community . . . the transportation community . . . the homeland security network . . . the arts community . . . the many other “non-aging” disciplines that have a stake—

whether they know it or not-- in the challenges and the opportunities presented by the upcoming group of older people?

Instead, traditionally, issues related to “older people” are addressed by those professionals, advocates, and providers who have a stated “direct stake” in the issues of the elderly population.

We typically turn to the experts in gerontology and geriatrics—the aging world . . . both to identify and to define the critical issues that need addressing . . . and then to create the needed solutions-- which we then ask other disciplines to accept and adopt.

However, the impact of the aging of the baby boomers, together with the increasing elements of diversity, is much more complex. The impact is interactive. It is dynamic. And, it has an overall effect on families— across **all age** groups . . . across **all population groups** . . . across **all community sectors** . . . and, ultimately, an effect on the global well-being of our communities.

If we want to sustain our communities as dynamic, vital places to live, to grow, to work, and to age . . . we need to change WHO is involved in the discussions around preparing for the impact of these demographic and social changes.

We modeled this paradigm change in Project 2015 when the Governor convened 36 New York State cabinet-level agencies . . . all with very different and wide-ranging missions and responsibilities . . . to work, as a cohesive entity, in this process for preparing for future change: the human service agencies, infrastructure agencies, economic development agencies, operational agencies, financing agencies . . . representing all aspects of government.

Through this process, these agencies found that they had a greater stake in the aging and increasing diversity of our population than they had thought; they found that they had mutual interests in the implications of these trends; and they identified the added value of engaging with other agencies in non-traditional collaborations.

### ***The concept of “Optimal Fit”***

As a result of their participation in the Project 2015 initiative, every New York state agency participating in the Project 2015 initiative concluded AND asserted that, in order to support the overall well-being of individual citizens and of New York State as a whole, the need will grow for optimizing the fit between the goods and services provided by government and the diverse set of consumers who use those goods and services.

This conclusion is reflected in the call by state agencies for customizing programs, services, products, forms, information, and communication to fit the demographic diversity of age, language, race, ethnic culture, disability, and circumstances that will characterize the State's population.

It is also reflected in the call to train agencies' existing and new staff in aging and diversity issues, in understanding the differing characteristics of people being served, and in effective communication with the various population groups.

### ***Role of the Aging Network***

New York's community-based aging network comprises 59 Area Agencies on Aging. Following New York's Project 2015 work at the state government level, the State's local aging network was trained on this initiative and encouraged to spearhead planning initiatives in each county. A *Project 2015: Tool Kit for Community Action* was created for use by the Area Agencies on Aging to educate and engage their county governments and agency leaders about the demographic changes specific to their own communities. The aging network proved to be a viable lead network for: preparing for demographic change at the community level . . . for understanding its importance in building vital communities, and . . . for directly assessing and addressing local impacts.

There are 655 Area Agencies on Aging across the United States. The growth in the older population provides this network, for the first time in history, with a compelling opportunity to take a leadership role in focusing on population change and how this will affect our communities ---- across age groups and across population groups.

### ***Current Project 2015 Activities***

Project 2015 is an on-going initiative. Following the work of the very structured planning process at the state government level, the initiative continues, in tangible ways and with tangible results. We continue to expand Project 2015 at both the state and national levels.

### ***State Agencies – Lasting Results***

At the state level, the State Office for the Aging is charged with monitoring Project 2015-related activities among the state agencies and with facilitating planning and development under Project 2015. As part of this commitment, my Office conducts a status review every year to document the individual agencies' activities engaged in under Project 2015.

These status reports provide evidence that the Project 2015 process works . . . that it results in better governing. They show that New York continues to build upon Project 2015's future-oriented, evidence-based planning approach . . . in preparing for change and in shaping the direction of our programs and services to be appropriately responsive to all the state's residents.

Through Project 2015, agencies are building and developing innovative problem-solving partnerships, implementing new projects and programs, customizing existing tools and services, and continuing to foster discussions with their local constituency groups and the wider community. In addition, because of the heightened awareness of the aging phenomenon through the work of Project 2015, greater consideration is given to the funding needs associated with the growing elderly population.

### ***Project 2015 – National Initiative***

The success of Project 2015 has garnered attention from many other states. New York's communities are not alone in experiencing profound shifts in the make-up of their resident populations. As a result, New York has made a commitment to share this practical, useful framework and process across the country with other states, communities, and organizations.

The New York State Office for the Aging, at the Governor's direction, has convened a collaborative of 19 diverse national organizations to serve as a vehicle for bringing the Project 2015 planning model to national scale. Through this national initiative, we will assist other states and communities in replicating or adapting New York's model for future-based planning around social and demographic change.

### ***Conclusion***

We can all agree that states and communities must prepare for the impact brought about by the changing face of our communities.

The Aging Network is taking a lead in this arena by suggesting that a new title be added to the Older Americans Act that would assist states and communities in planning and preparing for this impact.

The work of the Special Committee on Aging can significantly shape how we prepare for the impact of demographic change by supporting efforts such as this in order to facilitate this type of preparing at the government level and the community level.

Thank you for inviting me here today.