



Florida Association of
Aging Services Providers

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Florida Association of Aging Services Providers

Guest Editors: Darrell Drummond, Council On Aging of St. Lucie, Inc.; Karen Deigl, Senior Resource Association, Inc.; Elizabeth Lugo, The Volen Center

Message from the President

By Darrell J. Drummond, Council on Aging of St. Lucie, Inc.



Spring has sprung, summer is here and all the sayings we have come to know. Bottom line, this year is moving quickly as always! I have just recently witnessed another tour around the Sun and the third rock continues to survive; despite our worst impulses.

We are now in the summer months and, like me, many of you are working to close out this year's budget and approve your organization's budget for the next year.

As a whole, we are pleased, the Florida Senior Network accomplishments were impactful during this last legislative session. More dollars were allocated to senior programs, supporting that additional funds were set-aside to address the ever-growing

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waitlist for services brought about as a result of increased numbers of seniors coming to Florida and the many individuals aging in place (baby boomers).

This issue focuses on the concerns regarding isolation of seniors; the ability for seniors to find transportation assistance (I, too, have concerns regarding my father driving); the impact AI (Artificial Intelligence) is having and will have in the future of our daily lives. We are entering the hurricane season for Florida and this issue speaks to preparedness for our seniors and our agencies.

As we prepare to enjoy our summer months and reflect on the successes of the last year, I have a “stone in my shoe”; “a bee in my bonnet” and other phrases that we are all familiar with. I want to discuss my heartburn with this current political season; it has nothing to do

with Democrat or Republican Party politics. It has everything to do with ageism! Our mission statements all suggest that we, the senior network, are committed to making sure our clients have an opportunity to live out their golden years, independent, respected, and are allowed to remain relevant in our communities.



There is a suggestion that our current Presidential campaign is suspect because of the age of our leading candidates. Let me say as plainly as possible; THERE IS NO EXPIRATION DATE associated with senior individuals. Wisdom, brought about as a result

of age, time and experience matters. I can't imagine anyone in the financial community discounting the wisdom and expertise Warren Buffet (94 years old) brings to the table.

As we age and look forward to making our years here on the third rock meaningful, we must remind our youngsters of the importance of taking advantage of our senior knowledge and make sure the world benefits from our continued contributions to the overall collective!

August is just around the corner; our annual conference, Florida Council on Aging/Florida Association of Aging Services Providers is coming the first week of August.

We will again, meet at the Hyatt Regency in Orlando, August 5-7 to convene the Senior Network. The conference allows for applauding the efforts over the last year and preparing for the challenges and opportunities this next year will encounter.

Many sessions will be provided, an opportunity to interact with our government leadership, the Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA).



Additionally, many speakers, expert providers, as well as a comprehensive vendor group will be present to provide information on the ever-changing environment of technological offerings. Overall, the opportunity to share our individual successes and challenges always happens during our conference.

Please don't miss the opportunity to participate and, trust me, I will be looking to interact with as many of you as possible during the conference.

Hope Heroes and Hope Florida: A Pathway to Purpose



Hope Heroes

The Hope Heroes Program is a collaborative effort administered through the Department of Elder Affairs and Volunteer Florida, to fulfill special needs that can't always be met through traditional means. Hope Heroes volunteer their time and services to help mem-

bers in their community. The Department of Elder Affairs encourages retirees and older Floridians to give back to their community by becoming a Hope Hero. Seniors helping others creates a clear pathway to purpose and enhances everyone's quality of life. Organizations can join the Hope Heroes Program by becoming a Hope All-Star to help fill immediate and urgent needs in the community through group service.

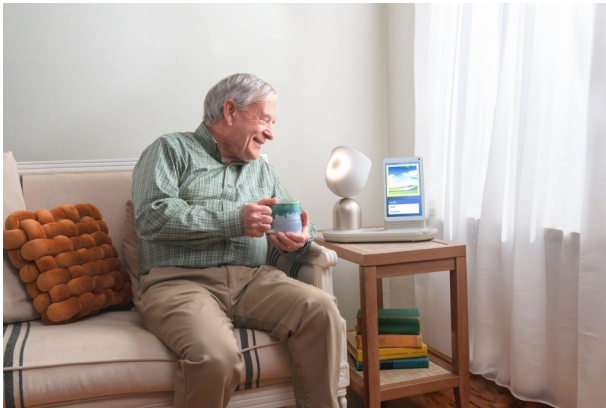
Hope Florida

Hope Florida is an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis to maximize resources and uncover opportunities by using the private sector, faith-based community, nonprofits, and government entities to support older Floridians in need of help.

A Special Companion to Combat Loneliness

By Elizabeth Lugo, The Volen Center

Last year, the Surgeon General named social connection as one of the top priorities to address. As we all know too well, social isolation takes a serious toll on mental and physical health and it is particularly prevalent among older adults who may be facing mobility challenges, smaller social circles, or long distance family members. Higher risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, diabetes, and even premature death are just some of the consequences associated with prolonged loneliness.



But there is a solution that has been implemented in the state of Florida for several years. In fact, approximately 500 Floridians are already using ElliQ to alleviate feelings of loneliness, improve their overall wellness, and remain independent in their homes and communities.

ElliQ is an AI robotic companion designed for older adults that live alone or spend most of their time alone. Powered by voice technology, it is incredibly simple to use. In contrast to many voice

assistance on the market today, ElliQ is proactive - meaning it initiates conversations and suggests activities throughout the day. It also uses artificial intelligence to remember past conversations, follow up, offer reminders, and become more personalized over time.

Engaging ElliQ

There are countless ways to engage with ElliQ, but activities typically center around companionship and entertainment, health and wellness, and connection or communication. A day with ElliQ may start with a shared cup of coffee, news or weather report, or a morning yoga session. In the afternoon, she may check in to see how a user is feeling, make sure they've eaten lunch and taken medications or ask if they'd like to play a game. ElliQ might also reach out in the evening to offer a mindfulness session, suggest they call a family member, or collaborate on a painting or poetry. Every day is a bit different, but the sense of companionship and empathy are constant.



The New York State Office for the Aging has a similar partnership with ElliQ and recently released a report with data regarding the efficacy of the program for the 800+ New Yorkers that currently use ElliQ. In the last year and a half, 95% of clients report that ElliQ is helpful in reducing loneliness and improving wellbeing. The data also shows that users engage with ElliQ 20+ times per day on average.

- 83% participate in physical exercises
- 91% of users play cognitive games
- 89% benefit from stress reduction activities



ElliQ has relationships with five Area Agencies on Aging and is in discussions with multiple other Area Agencies, state and community organizations across the state of Florida. With proven benefits like extending the time seniors can safely age in place, decreasing loneliness and alleviating all of the negative side effects and costs associated with it, simplifying communication and improving efficiency of check-ins with case managed clients, and encouraging adoption of healthier habits, which ultimately leads to better outcomes and lower costs, aging services providers are finding significant value in the solution.

To learn more, take a look at this recent CBS New Miami news story or visit ElliQ.com. For those interested in an introductory meeting or demonstration of ElliQ, please contact Meredith Skibinski at meredith@intuitionrobotics.com.

2024 Florida Conference on Aging



The Florida Conference on Aging, Florida's most comprehensive conference on aging, will be held August 5-7 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Orlando, FL. This annual conference offers outstanding training sessions, pre-conference intensives and an exhibit show for professionals and advocates in aging. The conference is presented jointly by the Florida Council on Aging, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, and the Florida Association of Aging Services Providers. The Florida Council on Aging will host the annual Quality Senior Living Awards Luncheon sponsored by Florida Power & Light. The event will be held Tuesday to honor individuals or organizations that have made outstanding contributions to seniors quality of life. For more information: www.fcoa.org/Conference

Voting by Mail in Florida

By Leslie R. Swan, Supervisor of Elections, Indian River County



Vote-by-mail, previously known as "Absentee Voting," is a convenient voting option available to all registered voters to receive and cast a paper ballot by mail. Voting by mail provides voters with the flexibility and convenience to vote from their homes or anywhere in the world. Voters do not need a reason to vote-by-mail; this option is open to any registered voter. In addition, any registered voter's legal guardian or immediate family (i.e., the designee's spouse or the parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, or sibling of the designee or of the designee's spouse) if directly instructed by the voter, can request a vote-by-mail ballot on their behalf.

A voter must have an active request on file with their local Supervisor of Elections to receive a vote-by-mail ballot. Mail ballots may be requested for a specific election or for all elections through the next scheduled general election. After that, the voter will need to renew their request.

A request for a vote-by-mail ballot may be made in person at the Elections Office, by email, fax, or online using the **Statewide Vote-By-Mail Ballot Request Form** (OS-DE 160 eff. 04/17/2024). A telephone request must include the voter's name, address, date of birth, plus the voter must provide their Florida Driver License or Florida ID number or the last four digits of their social security number, whichever may be verified in the supervisor's records.

It is important that the voter provides the Elections Office with the address they would like their ballot sent when requesting a mail ballot. Ballots will automatically be mailed to a voter's residential address unless the voter has a mailing address on file. The voter also has the option to provide an alternate address. Ballots are not forwardable, and any returned ballots marked as "undeliverable" or "temporarily away" trigger a letter (sent by forwardable mail) requesting a valid mailing address for a replacement ballot.



A voter can pick up a vote-by-mail ballot at their county's supervisor of elections office. Ballot pick-up is generally available six (6) weeks before the date of the election. Once the mandatory early voting period begins, ballot pick up at the Elections Office is prohibited unless there is an emergency, to the extent that the voter will be unable to go to a designated early voting site or their Election Day polling place. A voter or a voter's designee must complete an affidavit to affirm that they have an emergency keeping them from being able to vote at a designated early voting site or at their Election Day polling place.

Ballots are mailed between 40 and 33 days prior to an election for all domestic voters. Ballots for

UOCAVA (Military/Overseas) voters are sent no later than 45 days before an election. Vote-by-mail ballots are sent daily as new requests are received. A vote-by-mail ballot must be requested no later than 5 p.m. on the 12th day prior to an election for the ballot to be mailed.

It is important to keep your signature/identifying mark up to date with the Elections Office. Your signature on file with the Elections Office is used to verify the signature on your vote-by-mail ballot certificate envelope. You can update your signature/identifying mark by completing and submitting a Florida Voter Registration Application to your Supervisor of Elections office.

If you returned your ballot but forgot to sign the envelope, or if the signature has been flagged for review, your ballot may not count unless you complete and return the Vote-By-Mail Cure Affidavit form with a copy of your identification, no later than 5 p.m. two (2) days after the election. Voters who have a signature issue are notified by mail, email, and telephone, based on the information provided to the Elections Office by the voter.

A vote-by-mail ballot is only counted if it is received in the Supervisor of Elections Office in the county of residence by 7 p.m. on Election Day. Postmarks do not count. A voter can also bring their voted ballot to any early voting location during early voting hours or to the Elections Office during business hours.



Another option is to exchange the voted ballot for an in-person ballot at any early voting location or at the voter's assigned polling location on Election Day.

Your vote-by-mail ballot can be tracked by visiting your county's Supervisor of Elections website

to confirm when your ballot was received by the office or if there are any signature issues, the voter will be alerted and directed to the Vote-By-Mail Ballot Cure Affidavit link.

A common myth about mail ballots is that mail ballots are only counted if the election is close. In Florida, vote-by-mail ballots are the first ballots tabulated. The initial results posted on election night are the tabulated vote-by-mail and early voting results. Voting-by-mail is a safe and secure way to cast your ballot.

Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center Webinar on Workforce Investment Systems

Thursday, July 11, 2024 from 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM Eastern Time

This webinar will provide an overview of common workforce terminology, the role of a state workforce board, federal and state workforce funding vehicles, and insight into state workforce investment systems determination of high growth industries to prioritize in sector-based career pathway development. Registration for the webinar is now open by clicking on [Webinar Registration - Zoom](#)

Direct care workforce systems change initiatives benefit from a strong partnership between the state's workforce development system and the state's Medicaid and home and community-based service agencies. This Webinar will explore resources for those partnerships.

Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center

Created by the Administration for Community Living in 2022, the Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center provides technical assistance to states and service providers and facilitates collaboration with stakeholders to improve the recruitment, retention, training, and professional development of members of the direct care workforce.



Safe Mobility for Life: Helping Floridians Maintain Mobility Independence

By Gail M. Holley, Florida Department of Transportation

Today, Americans continue to drive well into their later years and for more miles than in the past. According to research by AAA, older adults can expect to outlive their ability to drive safely by 7 to 10 years. How do we balance the safety and mobility needs of Florida's growing aging population?

The Florida Department of Transportation, in partnership with the Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy, established a statewide multi-disciplinary Safe Mobility for Life Coalition to help improve the safety, access, and mobility needs of Florida's aging road users. With 30 member organizations, we work together to develop educational materials and resources to empower older adults to stay safe behind the wheel and beyond the driver's seat by achieving the keys to safe mobility for life, which are:

- **Understand** the impact aging has on driving.
- **Be proactive** about safe driving skills.
- **Plan** for a safe transition from driving.

Aging Road User

A driver, passenger, pedestrian, bicyclist, transit-rider, motorcyclist, or operator of a non-motorized vehicle who is over the age of 50 with a special focus on the 65 years and older age group.



As we age, we can become more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness, which can put us at greater health risks. Access to transportation options plays a crucial role in successfully helping older adults remain engaged, active, and independent within their communities.

Through empowering messaging and education, the Safe Mobility for Life Coalition

promotes the importance of maintaining mobility independence, which means to not rely on a car to get you everywhere you need and want to go.

To help find alternative transportation options, **FindaRideFlorida.org** was developed collaboratively between the University of Florida and the Florida Department of Transportation and can connect your clients to available transportation in all of Florida's 67 counties. It is a user-friendly website that can be used by following three steps:

1. **Visit FindaRideFlorida.org.** Enter the starting location and destination. Select any additional criteria and click "Find a Ride".
2. **Browse results.** Providers include Community Transportation Coordinators, public transit agencies, and private transportation providers.
3. **Choose your provider.** Call the phone number listed or click the "More Info" button to view additional details about their services.



The website also addresses the needs of low-vision users and offers links to screen readers that read the content aloud. Assistance is available to older adults who may not be comfortable using a computer through the *Find a Ride Helpline* by calling (352) 273-9624.

If you are interested in learning more about other educational materials or resources offered by the Safe Mobility for Life Coalition, visit SafeMobilityFL.com. You can also sign up at fdot.info/stayconnected to receive the latest news and updates that can help you address the safety and mobility needs of your clients.

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Curative Properties of the Magic Elixir

By Elizabeth Lugo, The Volen Center



What if I told you I could offer you something that would reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression and dementia? And, to make it even more attractive what if I told you that same product could decrease your chances for premature death?

In a society where we are all looking for the magic pill or injection to quickly lose those extra pounds or to improve our memory or libido, an offer like that would surely be met with enthusiasm and overwhelming interest. You would be just one of the many people clamoring to get their hands on this impressive life-changing treatment.

This miracle can't be bottled, is not available on the shelf at your local pharmacy and many physicians don't even think to prescribe it. This powerful treatment with amazing healing and curative properties needs no prescription and is already available for immediate consumption. No research and development phases to complete, no co-pays or deductibles, and no need to enroll in special financial assistance programs with big pharma.

It goes by brand names such as Social Interaction and Social Connection and it is readily available in the community in the forms of relationships and interactions with family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. It is also available in the form of Social Interventions offered through providers of aging services in the community.

According to ***Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community (2023)***, "lacking social connection can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day."

Additionally, there is substantial evidence that links social isolation with accelerated cognitive decline and an increased risk of dementia in older adults. According to this same publication, "chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50% in older adults, even after controlling for demographics and health status." Additionally, "when taken together, this evidence consistently shows that wider social networks and more frequent social engagements with friends and family are associated with better cognitive function and may protect against the risk of dementia."

The report goes on to say that "the evidence linking social connection to physical health is strongest in heart disease and stroke outcomes. Dozens of studies have found that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase the risk of morbidities from these conditions."

Among this evidence, a synthesis of data across 16 independent longitudinal studies shows poor social relationships (social isolation, poor social support, loneliness) were associated with a 29% increase in the risk of heart disease and a 32% increase in the risk of stroke.”

Studies on social interventions show significant evidence that social support and feeling connected can mitigate depression and improve overall mental health. Authors Naggy and Moore in their research on social interventions as published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* (Vol. 218, August 15, 2017, pgs. 131-152) concluded that “various types of social interventions can be effective in reducing adult depression. Social interventions can be tailored to diverse groups, are feasible in resource-scarce communities, and have the potential to reduce population-level depression due to their group formats.”



Interventions such as planned social events, exercise and wellness programs, regular nutritious meals provided in a communal setting, housekeeping and bathing assistance as well as transportation services are just a few of the ways to mitigate depression and social isolation in older adults.

The best prescription is not always a medication in a bottle.

According to the Congressional Budget Office’s report, **Research and Development in the Pharmaceutical Industry (April 2021)**, “the expected cost to develop a new drug—including capital costs and expenditures on drugs that fail to reach the market—has been estimated to range from less than \$1 billion to more than \$2 billion.” Imagine if that same funding, or even a percentage of it, was put into expanding social connection and interventions—the majority of which are already available through senior centers and aging services providers across the nation.

If funding was available to the aging network and senior centers to expand, increase services and serve more seniors, the impact on the health and well-being of older adults would be immense. Lives would be not only changed, but saved.

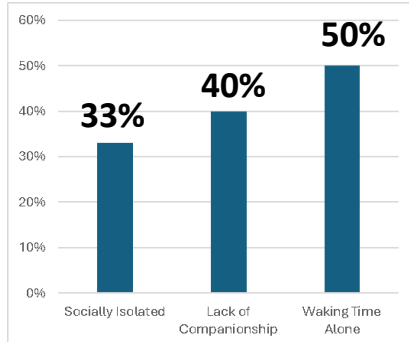
This all suggests that investments in social connection and interventions are an important public health response to cognitive decline and the overall health and well-being of older adults. It also suggests that providers in the aging network are already armed and ready to provide the curative solutions to some of the biggest healthcare challenges older adults, their families and caregivers are facing. These providers have the skill, the experience and the ability to distribute a life-saving remedy to older adults. They have the passion and desire; they just need the financial resources and support required to bring their product to market and distribute to the masses.

**We are not doctors or pharmacists, yet we can treat, heal and save.
We are the Aging Network.**

Resources to Increase Social Connections

Background Statistics

According to an article “Alone in America: How Attitudes About Connection Have Impacted Older Adults for the Worse” which appeared in the February 15, 2024 edition of The Incidental Economist, in 2023, about 33% of older adults reported being socially isolated while almost 40% reported lack of companionship, spending more than half of their waking hours alone each day.



Moreover, there are threats to mental and physical health associated with isolation and lack of social connections. The US Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory on the Healing Effects on Social Connection and Community titled “Our Epidemic of

Loneliness and Isolation” noted Social Isolation and Loneliness contribute to high blood pressure, obesity, and Alzheimer’s Disease.

Annual National Summit to Increase Social Connection

This summit was held May 14 and May 15 with the theme “The Intersection of Technology and Advancing Social Connections”. It was a joint initiative between the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults (engAGED). Two presentations were especially applicable to Aging Services Providers:

1. Commit to Connect www.committtoconnect.org



Commit to Connect is a cross-sector initiative by the Administration for Community Living to fight social isolation and loneliness by helping people connect and engage to build the social connections they need to thrive. Key efforts include the following:

- *Technical Assistance and Training* that includes professional and consumer resources as well as Webinars
- *Communities of Practice* that links agencies, networks, and community-based organizations with subject-matter-experts
- “*Innovations Hub*” to encourage replication of ideas with a clearinghouse of 8 data-driven programs, interventions, and solutions
- *Nationwide Network of Champions (NNOC)* which consists of 485 self-identified leaders at local, state, and national levels who are dedicated to ending social isolation and loneliness. The NNOC uses an online portal to connect and share questions, resources, information, and perspectives. <https://committtoconnect.org/become-champion/>

2. The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults (engAGED)

<https://www.engagingolderadults.org>



engAGED is a national effort to increase social engagement of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers through volunteerism, intergenerational programs, community involvement, arts/creative expression, technology, and lifelong learning. Areas of focus include the following:

Training which include events and Webinars hosted by engAGED and/or in collaboration with other organizations as well as presentations at conferences

Technical Assistance which consists of the following:

- An online hub of social engagement innovators
- Small group office hours calls
- Customizable materials for use by organizations in the Aging Network

Outreach which includes:

- The engAGED Newsletter
- Blog posts
- Social Media
- Consumer-facing brochures, flyers, and fact sheets that can be customized with logos and contact information

engAGED Resources include the following:

- Social Engagement Innovations Hub
- Technology Booklets for Consumers
- Online Safety Fact Sheet for Consumers
- Technology Manuals for Organizations

Disaster Preparedness for Dementia Caregivers



2024 Hurricane Season officially began June 1, and with it comes the big question “Are You Prepared”? A booklet resource for hurricane preparedness, developed by University of South Florida and the Alzheimer’s Association titled “Disaster Preparedness for Dementia Caregivers” is available by clicking on the link below.

[Disaster Preparedness for Dementia Caregivers](#)



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