

New Jersey Becomes 9th State Accepted into AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Initiative Aims to Make Communities Supportive & Accessible Places to Live for People of All Ages

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(TRENTON) – The Department of Human Services and AARP New Jersey today announced New Jersey has become the ninth state accepted into the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, which works to make communities supportive and accessible places to live for people of all ages.

“In New Jersey, we are making vital investments to help enhance the quality of life for everyone, including our older residents,” **Governor Phil Murphy** said. “I’m honored to be recognized by AARP for our work and committed to building on our efforts to create more accessible and more inclusive communities.”



“We are thrilled to receive this designation and are excited about getting to work making New Jersey an even more inclusive place to live at every stage of life,” **Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman** said. “I thank AARP for approving our designation and look forward to working with them and communities and stakeholders across New Jersey to turn this plan into reality. We owe it to our older adults to make sure they live in age friendly places and can participate in what their community offers.”

“We are all aging, every day. We know people are living and working longer, we know they want to remain in their homes and communities, and we know that being age-friendly improves the quality of life for everyone,” said **Stephanie Hunsinger, AARP New Jersey State Director**. “We commend the Governor and his administration for recognizing the need to make New Jersey an age-friendly state, and we look forward to continuing our work together to make New Jersey a great place to grow up, and grow old.”

The AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities helps participating states and communities adopt practices such as safe, walkable streets, better housing and transportation options, access to key services and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities.

As part of the effort, Human Services’ Division on Aging Services will focus on

providing older adults with a coordinated and seamless system of services across a wide range of areas that affect their lives. The Division will partner with other state Departments and community stakeholders such as mayors to develop a long-term plan to promote healthy aging throughout New Jersey.

“This is especially timely given the exacerbating impact COVID-19 has had on older adults and others who had already been experiencing social isolation, housing insecurity and transportation challenges,” **Division of Aging Services Director Louise Rush** said. “We’re excited to receive this designation and look forward to turning this concept into reality, for the benefit of older adults – and communities themselves – throughout New Jersey.”

In preparation for New Jersey joining the Network, Governor Phil Murphy recently signed Executive Order No. 227 creating the Age-Friendly State Advisory Council, which will work to identify opportunities for creating livable communities for people of all ages in New Jersey, recommend best practices for age-friendly work and promote community inclusion.

The Council, which will be chaired by Acting Commissioner Adelman and will include representatives from the New Jersey Departments of Transportation, Community Affairs, and Health, and representatives from local government, community stakeholder groups, the business sector, and the higher education community.

Within 18 months of the March 2 Order, Human Services will issue a blueprint of best practices for advancing age-friendly practices in transportation, housing, inclusivity and community support and health services.

The Governor’s proposed budget, meanwhile, reaffirms Governor Murphy’s commitment to New Jersey’s older adults and ensures access to health care by expanding the Pharmaceutical Assistance for the Aged and Disabled (PAAD) program to make prescription drugs more affordable.

The Governor proposes increasing the income eligibility for PAAD and Senior Gold programs by \$10,000, which will increase the number of seniors and others eligible by more than 20,000 residents.

Additionally, after expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 35 to 40 percent of the federal credit, the Governor’s budget proposes making senior citizens without dependents eligible for the EITC this year, effectively cutting taxes for seniors.

The budget plan would also increase hearing aid purchase reimbursement available under the state's Hearing Aid Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (HAAAD) program from \$100 to \$500 per hearing aid per calendar year. Beneficiaries must be enrolled in the PAAD program or the Lifeline Utility Assistance program - or meet the eligibility criteria for those programs - to participate.

It would be the first increase in the HAAAD program's reimbursement rate since the program was created in 1987.

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222 South Warren St 

PO Box 

Trenton, NJ 08625-0 