

Governor Phil Murphy

CYMI: Human Services Releases Age-Friendly Blueprint, Announces Grant Program to Help Communities Implement Strategies to Make NJ More Age-Friendly

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Blueprint provides recommendations to help communities become more inclusive, allow residents to age in place

TEANECK – With New Jersey’s older adult population steadily growing, Human Services today released the NJ Age-Friendly Blueprint, which provides strategies and best practices to improve New Jersey’s communities for older adults and enable people to remain in their homes and communities as they age.

The Department also announced the dedication of \$5.5 million to launch an Age-Friendly Community Grant Program to help communities advance Age-Friendly practices, prioritizing those in the Blueprint. The grant program is expected to launch later this year.

“The NJ Age-Friendly Blueprint and grant program reaffirms our commitment to supporting New Jerseyans at every stage of life,” **said Governor Phil Murphy**. “These important strategies and best practices will help us ensure that New Jersey’s communities are age-friendly, accessible, and inclusive. In New Jersey, we will continue to work to help enhance the quality of life for every resident, regardless of age.”

Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman made the announcement at the Brookdale Senior Apartments in Teaneck during an event to commemorate Older Americans Month. She was joined by Teaneck Mayor Michael Pagan, Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suarez, Department of Health Deputy Commissioner Jeff Brown, Age-Friendly Teaneck Executive Director Elizabeth Davis, and AARP New Jersey State Director Chris Widelo.

“New Jersey, like the rest of the country, is at the threshold of an enormous demographic shift. The growth in our older adult population is an opportunity to make our communities more inclusive and integrated – it is not a problem to solve, but a chance to rethink how we want to live, work, and engage in our communities throughout the lifespan,” **said Commissioner Adelman**. “The Blueprint coupled with the grant program will enable communities to make strategic changes that will have a lasting impact, and make it easier for residents to remain independent, stay in their homes and participate in the community as they grow older.”

In 2021, Governor Phil Murphy signed [Executive Order 227](https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-227.pdf) (<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-227.pdf>), creating an Age-Friendly State Advisory Council within Human Services. The executive order called for the department to develop a blueprint, informed by the Advisory Council, outlining strategies to advance age-friendly practices across the state. Commissioner Adelman chaired the Council.

The blueprint provides recommendations related to housing, health care, transportation, socialization, employment, communication, and outreach that can be implemented to make communities more accessible for residents of all ages, and facilitate access to long-term services and supports that will allow residents to remain in their homes and connected to their loved ones as they age.

To read the blueprint, click [here](https://d31hzhk6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20240530/d9/4f/ea/90/15eeff0c846d9e31e4fa33cd/AF_Blueprint.pdf) (https://d31hzhk6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20240530/d9/4f/ea/90/15eeff0c846d9e31e4fa33cd/AF_Blueprint.pdf).

“I am grateful to my fellow council members and everyone who contributed to this conversation. It will take all of us working together to move New Jersey toward more Age-Friendly conditions. This blueprint is a starting point to get business organizations, neighborhoods, policymakers, and all New Jerseyans thinking about large and small ways we can better support our neighbors,” added Commissioner Adelman.

The Council included representatives from state and local government, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community groups, and drew from both professional expertise and personal experience to identify best practices for an age-friendly New Jersey. Members met monthly starting in March 2022, and held two public listening sessions which were live-streamed on YouTube. The Council’s discussions, presentations, and public listening sessions form the basis of this blueprint.

“The practices highlighted in this report can help communities make enhancements that make sense for their residents so they can continue to enjoy living in the community in their own home,” **said Kaylee McGuire, Deputy Commissioner for Aging and Disability Services**. “Comprehensive policies that support aging communities will enhance health, well-being, satisfaction, and quality of life for all. We are glad we can provide funding to help communities plan for and adopt policies and practices that will benefit all residents.”

“Teaneck’s age-friendly community initiative is now more than 8 years old, and the effort has led to many tangible improvements touching on all aspects of residents’ lives – from making our intersections safer for pedestrians, to increasing community support for affordable housing and other age-friendly community design improvements, to creating new opportunities for young and older generations to bond, to making sure older residents are better-informed about services and strategies for aging-in-place. These efforts will only strengthen in the coming years, with the soon-to-open Age-Friendly Teaneck community center and with a new undertaking begun last year to offer enhanced support to residents who are aging with disabilities,” **said Teaneck Mayor Michael Pagan**.

“New Jersey residents overwhelmingly want to enjoy their senior years by aging in their beloved home state, surrounded by their family and friends. DCA offers a broad array of programs and services that are designed to make aging in place possible, including the Low-Income Homeowners Rehabilitation Fund that provides money for repairs and rehabilitation for homes owned by low-income homeowners,” **Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez said**.

“The experience and wisdom of our older adults promote a diverse and dynamic workforce, which is crucial to maintaining a robust economy,” **said Robert Asaro-Angelo, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development**. “The NJ Age-Friendly Blueprint will assist our state to foster a community where this vital population can continue to drive innovation and economic stability.”

“Helping to ensure that New Jersey can support the needs of our growing older adult population is central to our mission of protecting health and promoting healthy communities,” **said Department of Health Commissioner Kaitlan Baston, M.D.** “This initiative will provide communities with the tools to guide efforts to encourage healthy aging and to help residents age in place.”

“We are pleased to have the backing of the greater Teaneck community and the state of New Jersey as we continue to work with a broad coalition of community leaders and residents to identify and put in place the policies and solutions that can make this community - and others across the state - healthier and more inclusive places for people of all ages and abilities,” **said Age-Friendly Teaneck Executive Director Elizabeth Davis**.

New Jersey’s population of individuals 65 and over is expected to grow from 1.5 million in 2019 to 1.9 million by the year 2030. By the end of this decade, 1 in 5 New Jerseyans will be 65 or older.

[Age-friendly communities](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/an-introduction.html) (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/an-introduction.html>) are welcoming and livable for people

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of all ages. In 2021, [New Jersey became the ninth state to join the AARP Network of Age Friendly Communities \(https://nj.gov/humanservices/news/pressreleases/2021/approved/20210503.html\)](https://nj.gov/humanservices/news/pressreleases/2021/approved/20210503.html). This designation recognizes progress made to make the state more accessible and inclusive for all residents.

At the time of signing, 14 New Jersey communities were members of AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, including Somerset County, the first Age-Friendly county in the state. That number has since grown to 23, with Bergen and Ocean counties also joining. In 2016, the Age-Friendly North Jersey Alliance began, bringing together age-friendly projects from 16 communities to collaborate on best practices and advocate for community improvements. The Age-Friendly State Advisory Council members were appointed to continue the age-friendly legacy and to engage new partners to create a comprehensive vision for the state.

"Older adults play a valuable role in our community and economy, and an age-friendly New Jersey will ensure their involvement and contributions are fully utilized," said **Division of Aging Services Assistant Commissioner Louise Rush, who also served on the Council**. "As New Jersey's population ages, age-friendly communities benefit everyone, enhancing the state as a fulfilling place to live."

"The NJ-Age Friendly Blueprint underlines the state's commitment to older New Jerseyans. New Jersey joined AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities in 2021, and we are proud to have worked to inform this blueprint and partnered with communities across the state as they strive to become more age-friendly. Now is the time to roll up our sleeves and implement this blueprint," said **State Director for AARP New Jersey Chris Widelo**.

Becoming an age-friendly community begins with assessing the livability factors and creating a tailored plan. The recommendations in the blueprint can be incorporated into community plans based on local needs. Communities, municipalities, and counties must assess their population, resources and needs to make a difference in the lives of residents.

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