

The Erie County Department of Senior Services had several significant accomplishments in 2013 that further the Department's mission to help older adults maintain their health and independence as they age. Each goes beyond minimum expectations for delivering high quality affordable service. The following report provides an overview of the most noteworthy.

# 2013 Year in Review

Erie County Department of Senior Services

Randall A. Hoak, Commissioner

---

## Executive Summary

---

Times have changed. No organization, including public agencies, can expect that significant new funding will come its way without a compelling case for it. Successful organizations must be entrepreneurial, look for new opportunities in unexpected places, and seek new, and sometimes untraditional, partnerships—all while improving the quality of service and maximizing efficiency. In 2013, the Department of Senior Services worked across all of these fronts to increase its ability to deliver high quality cost effective services to Erie County's older adults.

The report that follows provides an overview of particularly noteworthy accomplishments of the Department during the past year. It begins with a review of the Department's reorganization, and moves on to account for several efforts that were made to strengthen traditional services. From there, the report provides details on the Department's capacity building efforts in the past year, which will continue in earnest in 2014. Lest one believe the Department has lost sight of its most essential functions, such as public education and advocacy, the report details several things it did to demonstrate a commitment to doing the basics better before moving on to a concluding section on the year ahead.

## Department Reorganization

---

The 18 months prior to 2013 witnessed the retirement of several long-standing senior managers who had served the Department of Senior Services for several decades. While the exodus left a leadership void, it afforded the Department the opportunity to restructure to better reflect increased expectations for service integration and efficiency. The reorganization resulted in significant savings that were used to expand funding for services.

### From 5 Teams to 2 Divisions

Prior to the reorganization, the Department had 5 ‘teams’—Information & Referral (I&R), Nutrition, Program Development and Evaluation (PDE), Fiscal, and Contracts, each headed by a team leader. The Department now has 2 Divisions—Administration and Services. Each of the Divisions is led by a Supervisor, and each has a Coordinator that serves as a second in command. Together these 4 individuals make up the Commissioner’s Executive Management Team, which replaces the old team leaders.

*Reorganization produced \$250,000 in savings, and encourages greater collaboration among service staff.*

As with the old structure, each Division has program managers that oversee the day to day administration of programs, including the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Insurance Resource Center, the Erie County Elderly Nutrition Services program (ECENS), and the Caregiver Resource Center. To reinforce the increasing importance of prevention and health promotion, the Department has also created a new Wellness team that includes the Caregiver Resource Center, the ECENS program, and the new Choose Healthy health promotion programs.

### Savings

The reorganization eliminated four positions, and resulted in payroll reductions of more than \$250,000 for 2014.

## **Strengthening Traditional Programs**

---

The Department of Senior Services is responsible for coordinating the delivery of Older American Act services through a network of public and non-profit agencies in Erie County. Given increased demand for services in the absence of additional funding, the Department must work harder than ever to ensure that public dollars are used wisely and reach the most people. One of the most significant accomplishments of 2013 was being able to strengthen a number of programs in the Department.

### **Erie County Elderly Nutrition Services Program**

2012 was a year marked with uncertainty for the Erie County Elderly Nutrition Services (ECENS) program. Demand for home delivered meals was on the rise, funds were projected to go down due to sequestration in 2013, and considerable time was being spent managing a program that was considered to be in crisis. Last year began with a projection that the Department would need to serve 45,000 more home delivered meals than it had budgeted for, or implement a wait list for this service. We finished the year with no waitlist and within budget. The ECENS program is currently healthier than it has been in a number of years. Several factors contribute to this.

Centralized Service Authorization. Early in 2013 the Department streamlined and centralized the service authorization process for its home-delivered meal program. Clients continue to be assessed for eligibility through our county-wide case management system, but all service ordering for the ECENS home-delivered meals program is now initiated solely by the Department of Senior Services. This allows Senior Services staff to perform a final screening to ensure that all individuals meet program requirements and allows better monitoring of program capacity. The Department can now effectively track the number of meals served, average volume, and more accurately predict service demand for the year.

Request for Proposals. The Department issued a Request for Proposals for the senior nutrition programs in the spring of 2013.

This process resulted in considerable savings for the ECENS program, with the average cost of congregate meals going down from \$5.53 to \$4.65 per meal. The savings realized will allow the Department of Senior Services to purchase approximately 40,000 more meals across its nutrition programs, sets aside money for ethnic meals, and most importantly allows us to reduce the suggested voluntary contribution for meals served at local senior centers as part of the Stay Fit senior lunch program. In 2013, seniors were asked to contribute \$3.50 for each lunch. In the new year, the suggested contribution will go down to \$3.00.

The RFP process also resulted in the County, for the first time, having contracts in place with two Meals on Wheels agencies that provide home delivered meals to seniors in the north towns—Amherst Meals on Wheels and Ken-Ton Meals on Wheels. Together these two agencies provide service in a portion of the County that is home to approximately 20% of Erie County’s seniors.

*Throughout 2013, the Department worked to strengthen the services Erie County seniors rely on most—home delivered meals, rides to the doctor, case management services, and senior center activities like the lunch program.*

### **New York Connects**

Since 2011, New York Connects has served as the single point of authorization for the Erie County Department of Mental Health’s programs for older adults with serious mental illness. After two years of work and legal consultation, the Department will be able to implement use of a central client database that will facilitate information sharing between the Department of Senior Services,

and the community agencies providing services to these high risk older adults. Central to moving forward has been the establishment of a new client consent process that will ensure that client privacy remains paramount, and that information is shared in strict compliance with HIPAA regulations.

## **Transportation**

In the 2013 County Capital Budget, the Department requested and was granted \$100,000 as the initial part of a five year plan to replace aging vehicles in the Going Places fleet. The Department has been able to use the 2013 capital monies to acquire six replacement vehicles, all of which we hope to have in the fleet by Spring 2014.

Eighty percent of the cost of four of these replacement vehicles (\$143,761), which are actually mini-buses with wheelchair transportation capability, are being paid for with New York State Department of Transportation administered, Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 funding, which we successfully applied for in 2013. Our 2013 Capital Budget is covering the 20% (\$34,941) local share cost of the four mini-buses, with the remaining 2013 Capital monies purchasing two additional replacement vans which will join the fleet in January 2014.

## **Health Promotion**

Health promotion has long been a component of the Department's service offerings. In 2013, the Department made significant strides in enhancing its health promotion activities by expanding its offering of evidence based health promotion programs, including the Chronic Disease Self Management program (CDSMP), Diabetes Self Management program (DSMP) and Matter of Balance. For each of these three, the Department has invested in having staff members trained as certified master trainers. Having master trainers allows the Department to significantly expand its program volume by recruiting and training volunteer 'peer leaders' who can conduct classes throughout Erie County. As these programs become increasingly important to helping individuals manage their chronic conditions and health risk factors, new revenue sources to support them are beginning to become available. The work the Department has done in 2013 provides a foundation for making the most of new opportunities that are emerging in this program area.

## **Case Management**

In 2013, the Department's Caregiver Resource Center developed a new case manager training module—The Dementia Journey. In this

training case managers (CMs) learn about dementia and how the numerous diseases of which it is a symptom are diagnosed. Because it is the most common, Alzheimer's Disease and its various stages are explored. This information enables CMs to better understand the person's functional level, thus allowing them to share timely information with the caregiver about local resources. The CMs also learn how to best communicate directly with the person who has the diagnosis, which is often a role modeling opportunity that helps the caregiver. Tips for dealing with challenging behaviors are shared as well as discussions around common issues, such as driving concerns and safety at home. At times, CMs are the first professionals a caregiver meets after their loved one has been diagnosed, so it is important they receive accurate and appropriate information to help them on their caregiving journey.

### **Senior Center Recreation**

Thanks to the work of the Department's Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, the Department will now be regularly offering "University Express" classes at local senior centers throughout Erie County. This is a low-cost program that utilizes volunteer instructors for one day 'seminars' on a variety of interesting topics ranging from the European Union to the proper preparation of tea. The County's older adults love these free classes and they provide natural volunteer recruitment events to help keep our seniors active and engaged in their communities.

---

## Building Capacity to Serve a Growing Population

---

In 2013, the Department of Senior Services also made significant strides in building its capacity to serve Erie County's growing older adult population by working to identify new partnerships and sources of revenue to supplement traditional funding. Below are details on two important prongs in that effort—the Ready or Not grant from the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York, and the Targeted Technical Assistant grant from the Administration for Community Living.

### Ready or Not

In late 2012, the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York awarded the Department a \$50,000 grant as part of its “Ready or Not” initiative. This effort was created to help local agencies build their organizational capacity to meet the demands of health care reform and make the most of new opportunities that are rising up in its wake.

*To meet the needs of a growing older adult population, the Department must find new resources to support its mission. This starts with building strong relationships in the community, and reexamining how services are delivered.*

The first twelve months of the Ready or Not grant has been largely focused on taking stock of where the Department is in terms of capacity and getting the help needed to position the Department to play a vital role in the changing health care landscape. Within that broad arena, there are four specific areas of focus—culture change within the Department; relationship-building within the community; aligning services with emerging requirements

associated with federal and state health care reform; and identifying and bringing new resources to the Department to support its mission.

Culture change. Although there is broad agreement among Senior Services staff regarding the Department's traditional functions, there is considerably less consensus about a future role in health care. Staff is not accustomed to thinking of their work as impacting health care per se. The Department has long emphasized the distinction between the "social model" and the "medical model." It has emphasized "maintaining independence" over "reducing health care costs." In order for the Department to move beyond its traditional functions to a more enhanced role in health care, it will need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the impact of its services.

To that end, a concerted effort was initiated in 2013 to improve staff understanding of the evolving role of the Department in health and human services. Particular emphasis has been placed on improving internal communication. In October, the Department published its first one page monthly news bulletin, Cliff's Note, to help staff stay abreast of changes and new initiatives. In addition, for the first time, the Department is supplementing executive-level management meetings with regular meetings of the Department's program managers. These meetings are held monthly and help ensure that there is alignment among management staff on Department goals and priorities.

Community relationship building. In addition to improving communication and understanding of Department priorities internally, a primary goal in 2013 has been strengthening relationships with traditional partners, and developing new ones that will be increasingly important in the years ahead. These efforts included informal discussions with community leaders, formal presentations to stakeholders such as "A Conversation with the Commissioner," and bringing partners together to pursue opportunities to secure new resources for Erie County. These efforts have not gone unnoticed, and the Department has been applauded for them, including by those at the Health Foundation who are overseeing our Ready or Not efforts. At this point in time, success on this front should be considered a signature accomplishment for the Department. Collaboration and coordination toward service system development is an essential component of both the Department's traditional role as an Area Agency on Aging, and its potential future role as a health care integrator. Nothing is more

important at this moment in time than building strong relationships with community partners.

Aligning services. A number of steps have been made to begin to align our traditional services with new expectations that are emerging in response to health care reform. We have completed a baseline assessment of services and the Department's current level of service integration as indicated by the number of clients receiving multiple services. We are working to modify our Diabetes Self-Management program so that it qualifies for Medicare reimbursement, and we are working with community partners to explore new programming that is needed in Erie County to improve population health and reduce healthcare costs.

*The Department is looking beyond government funding to support services for seniors in Erie County. It is pursuing grants, exploring public-private partnerships, and preparing for new reimbursement models.*

Pursuing new resources. The final focal area under the Ready or Not grant has been working to find new resources to support aging services in Erie County. This includes identifying steps needed to be able to bill Medicare, so that we can maximize funding for evidence based health promotion programming. It includes supporting grant applications by academic partners such as Dr. Machiko Tomita at the University at

Buffalo who featured the Department in a National Institute of Health grant application submitted this past fall. And it includes the pursuit of competitive grants that the Department identifies and applies for directly, including the successful Targeted Technical Assistance grant from the Administration for Community Living that the Department was awarded earlier this year.

### **Targeted Technical Assistance**

In March 2013, the Administration on Community Living (ACL) released a Request for Applications (RFA) for "Targeted Technical

Assistance to Build the Business Capacity of Aging and Disability Community-Based Organizations for Integrated Care Partnerships.” In May, the Department was notified that the joint application of the Erie County Department of Senior Services and the Niagara County Office for the Aging was successful and that we would be one of nine sites in the country to participate in a national learning collaborative that will run for approximately two years.

The Erie-Niagara project brings together a group of community based organizations that have been an integral part of the Erie Niagara aging network for several decades, including Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Community Concern of Western New York, The Dale Association, Inc., DeGraff Adult Day Care, Health Association of Niagara County, Inc (HANCI), Hearts and Hands Faith in Action, Meals on Wheels of Western New York, Schiller Park, Schofield Residence Adult Day Health Care Program, Town of Amherst Department of Senior Services, Town of Hamburg Adult Day, and United Way of Buffalo and Erie County. These are experienced providers of home and community based services including care-planning, care transitions, home-delivered meals, personal care, and transportation, which are likely to be sought after as we move forward with integrated health care.

The technical assistance from the Administration for Community Living will provide a foundation for understanding the elements needed to make the most of new opportunities associated with health care reform. This includes learning more about contracting to provide the type of integrated service packages, and new revenue sources, reimbursement processes, and the performance demands that are attached to them.

### **Bringing Ready or Not and TTA together.**

Recipients of the Targeted Technical Assistance grant were being encouraged to attend the annual n4a conference in Louisville, KY and the ACL preconference intensive, which was held at the end of July. The intensive, Building Community-Based Integrated Care Systems, provided two days of training on a wide-range of capacity building topics including organizational culture change, strategic planning, building partnerships, and developing pricing structures.

We believed attending the pre-conference intensive would be tremendously beneficial for our community partners. The content of the workshops was timely and in-line with the capacity building needs in the Erie-Niagara aging services community. Participants would have the opportunity to meet individuals from across the country that were undergoing the same capacity building efforts. Most importantly, attending this conference together with our project partners would provide a 'retreat-like' experience and help to galvanize local progress on providing high quality integrated health care.

Given the benefit to be gained from attending the conference, and the alignment of the Targeted Technical Assistance grant with the goals of Ready or Not, the Department decided to submit a request to the Health Foundation to fund the trip, which it did in full. As a result, many local partners were able to join us in Louisville, and Erie-Niagara had a note-worthy introduction to the ACL learning collaborative partners from across the country.

## **Doing the Basics Better**

---

As evidenced in the preceding pages, 2013 was a busy year filled with special projects and internal overhaul. Given that, it would have been easy to let the basics take care of themselves. The Department refused to do that. Senior managers to front line staff delivered services with excellence and in a number of cases, went beyond expectations to truly enhance the scope and quality of those things the Department does on a day to day basis.

### **Reaching Target Populations**

The Older Americans Act mandates that funds be targeted to those in greatest economic and social need, including low-income seniors, members of ethnic and racial minorities, and older adults living in remote rural locations where service has traditionally been harder to deliver. In 2013, the Department did a number of things to better serve these often hard to reach populations. We provided cultural competency training to subcontract agencies, expanded our targeting of Powerful Tools for Caregivers to racial and ethnic minorities that traditionally have been less likely to access this program, and for the first time, we held Elder Law Day in downtown Buffalo. Finally, and most noteworthy, the new contract with Ken-Ton Meals on Wheels provides, for the first time, Older American Act funding to an agency that serves a community that has a significant percentage of seniors living in poverty or near poverty conditions.

### **Public Education and Advocacy**

Another statutory obligation of the Department is public education—providing the broader community with information on the needs of seniors, the aging network of services, and calling attention to the tremendous community resource that is the older adult population. The Department made a concerted effort in 2013 to improve the public education it provides. We redesigned the Department's newsletter to better profile our gateway service, NY Connects. We held two public hearings to present the County with the Department's area plan rather than one. This allowed the

Department to have one that was geared toward the general public, and a second which specifically sought input from the service provider community. Plus, we initiated a new program, Senior of the Month, to celebrate area seniors who have led inspirational lives and have made significant contributions to their communities.

On the advocacy front, the Department continues to contribute to efforts to ensure that services for seniors are recognized for their tremendous value, and that resources are invested in home and community based services that help the elderly meet their daily needs while living independently in the community. This year, Senior Services Commissioner, Randall Hoak, was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association on Aging in New York. In that capacity, he works with others across the state to advocate for seniors and the agencies that provide the services that help maintain independence and promote dignified aging.

### **Expertise Sharing**

The staff of the Erie County Department of Senior Services, in and of themselves, is a community resource because of their extensive expertise. In 2013, several staff members made presentations at professional conferences including the annual conference of the International Council on Active Aging, the Aging Concerns United Us

*The Department has been mindful not to neglect the basics while it is striving to be innovative.*

conference, the NY State Meals on Wheels Association conference, and a number of others. Staff spoke on topics ranging from evidence based health promotion to service delivery for older adults with serious mental illness. The Department also worked to produce sustainable ways to

share information and expertise. A major undertaking in 2013, for example, was the development of *Hoarding 101*, a PowerPoint presentation about hoarding and how to access related resources in Erie County. Local professionals have been trained to present *Hoarding 101* to others in their organizations or community, thus magnifying the educational reach of the Department.

## The Year Ahead

---

The Department will not rest on its laurels in 2014. It will use the momentum built in the past year to continue to make gains on the various fronts discussed throughout the *2013 Year in Review*.

We will continue to strengthen traditional services, with particular emphasis being placed on improving participation in the Stay Fit Dining program, enhancing NY Connects, and continuing to improve service utilization processes. Early this year, we will initiate a pilot for delivering consumer-directed home care to those who live in parts of the County where it has traditionally been difficult to provide service. The Department will also lead a community effort to convene a new Fall Prevention Coalition which will work to raise awareness of fall risks, and expand the availability of evidence based fall prevention programs and interventions.

*What can be expected from the Department of Senior Services in 2014? Energy, innovation, and a commitment to working with community partners to better serve Erie County's older adults.*

Capacity building efforts will also continue as the Department works to establish public-private partnerships that mobilize resources for the benefit of older adults in our community. A primary focus of the upcoming year will be clarifying the role of the Department in the changing health care system. This will include continuing to work with the Administration for Community Living and others in

the national learning collaborative created by the Targeted Technical Assistance grant. In addition, the Department will continue to work with the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York and others who are committed to seeing 'all boats rise' as new opportunities present themselves for human service providers in the accelerating movement toward a more person-centered approach to health care.

Prepared by the Erie County Department of Senior Services  
95 Franklin St.  
Buffalo, NY 14202

January 2014