



# Tompkins County Office for the Aging

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## **2015 Strategic Plan for Aging in Tompkins County**

### **Introduction**

A primary responsibility of the Tompkins County Office for the Aging (TCOFA) is assessing the needs of local older adults and planning an array of programs and services to meet those needs. To that end, TCOFA conducts periodic surveys, needs assessments, as well as collects stakeholder input to gauge the status of older adults in Tompkins County.

In 2012, TCOFA conducted Needs Assessment of the 60+ population in Tompkins County ([www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa/surveys/facts](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa/surveys/facts)), through a statistically-valid random sample telephone survey. This provides a comprehensive overview of the status of the 60+ population in Tompkins County across several domains.

In 2014, TCOFA conducted a Housing Needs/Preferences Survey among older adults, with a focus on the status of local housing needs.

To provide an additional dimension to the survey and needs assessment data, TCOFA sought to engage older adults and community stakeholders in discussions to articulate the status of aging in Tompkins County: our strengths, challenges, opportunities, and priorities for action. Beginning in May, 2014, with the help of several collaborating partners, TCOFA engaged 145 community stakeholders in a series of eight separate discussions or “consensus conferences,” each of them two hours and thirty minutes in length, on topics related to aging. The end result of this process is a summary of the input from informed community stakeholders about our community’s strengths, needs and recommendations for action on these age-related topics. This valuable input informs TCOFA’s strategic planning, as well as that of public and private organizations in addressing the needs of older adults in the community.

### **Consensus Conference Overview**

The eight topic areas covered in the consensus conferences included:

1. Civic Engagement, Volunteerism and Education
2. Financial Exploitation and Elder Abuse
3. Financial Security and Employment
4. Housing
5. Long Term Care
6. Medical Care

7. Mental Health
8. Transportation

TCOFA employed a common framework for each group discussion, using a “consensus conference.” A consensus conference attempts to elicit stakeholder attitudes and opinions through a group decision making process. This forum offers opportunity for equal input for participants. This type of process is appropriate for topics that are socially relevant and need public support.

Each consensus conference is limited in size to 30 people or less to allow each person to participate in the discussion. TCOFA invited a broad and diverse range of participants to each consensus conference, including older adults, community members, professionals, public and private sector representatives, business leaders, academics, and medical providers to name a few. In the end, 145 stakeholders participated and contributed to this process.

Each consensus conference was approximately 2 hours and thirty minutes in length and was facilitated by a knowledgeable leader who provided expertise and direction on the topic. Participants were given reading material relevant to each topic prior to attending and were asked to be prepared to discuss this information from their own perspective. At the meeting, the facilitator provided the group with an agenda and explanation of the process. Each group was then provided with national and local demographics on the topic area. All groups were asked to consider the following questions throughout the discussion:

- a. What areas must be addressed to serve an increasingly diverse older adult population? (racial/ethnic diversity; lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community, limited English proficiency)
- b. How do we address the needs of rural elders?
- c. Are there evidence-based programs, best practices or other innovative models being used in other communities that we would like to replicate in Tompkins County?
- d. Are there technological issues/solutions to consider?
- e. Are there learning needs/training needs associated with any of these recommendations?

Each group was then led through a facilitated discussion on the strengths and highlights, issues and needs and recommendations, priorities and opportunities for action. Once the discussion was complete, participants voted on the priorities for action. The individual reports under each topic area may be found at [www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa/surveys/facts](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa/surveys/facts)

### **Overview of the Demographics of the Aging Population in Tompkins County**

According to the 2010 Census, there was a 34% increase in Tompkins County’s 60+ population from 11,967 people in 2000 to 16,042 people in 2010. This increase is largely attributable to the leading edge of the Baby Boomers reaching the age of 60. A closer look finds that between 2000 and 2010, there was an 89% increase in the

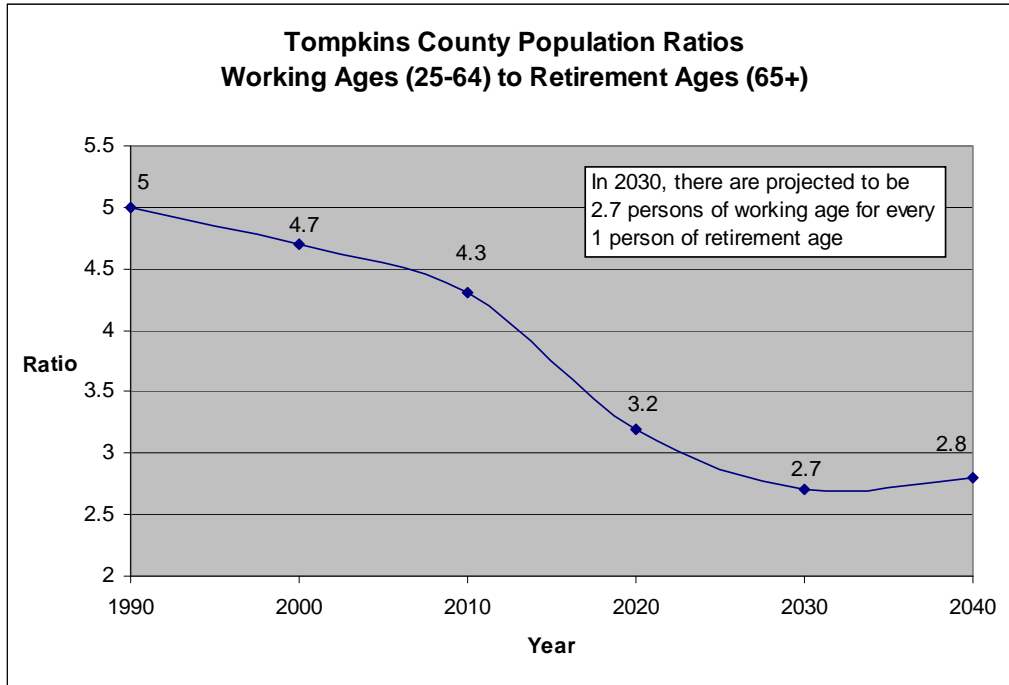
population ages 60-64. The impact of the Baby Boomers entering the ranks of the 60+ population was evident in the results of TCOFA's 2012 needs assessment: overall, many 60+ Baby Boomers are actively employed, socially engaged, own their homes, drive themselves, and have relatively few long term care needs. This will change over time.

The 60+ population will continue to increase in the coming decades, peaking at approximately 21,590 people in 2030. The 85+ population will increase 54% from 1,252 in 2000 to 2,721 in 2040. The following table is a projection of Tompkins County's population based on age, with the shaded cells highlighting where the peaks in population growth will take place by age cohort.

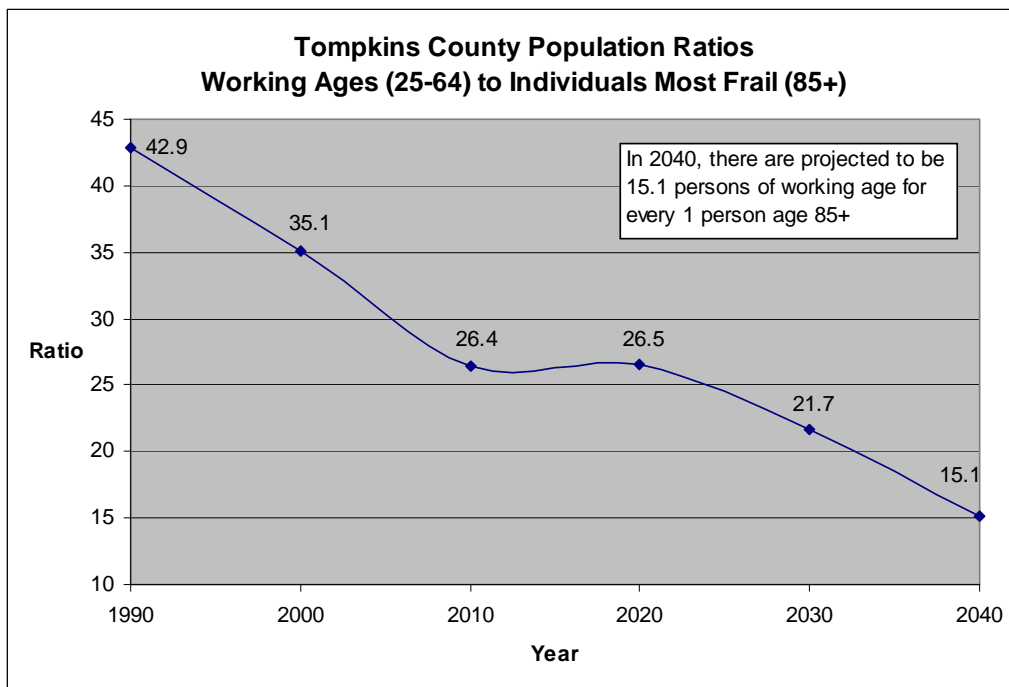
<b>Tompkins County Population Trends</b>					
Source: U.S. Census and Cornell Program on Applied Demographics					
<b>Year</b>	<b>0-59</b>	<b>60-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>	<b>75-84</b>	<b>85+</b>
<b>2000</b>	84,534	2,710	4,637	3,368	1,252
<b>2010</b>	85,522	5,113	5,711	3,421	1,797
<b>2020</b>	82,699	4,929	8,452	3,947	1,705
<b>2030</b>	81,303	4,159	9,720	5,756	1,955
<b>2040</b>	80,059	3,838	6,526	5,462	2,721

At the same time that the population of older adults is growing, the younger generations will be relatively smaller in size, exacerbating workforce and care giving issues. The combination of these factors will place additional pressures on an already strained local long term care system.

The following graph shows the projected population ratios for Tompkins County, comparing the number of people of working age (25-64) to retirement age (65+). In 1990, there were roughly 5 people of working age (25-64) for every one person of retirement age (65+). This ratio is projected to fall to a low of 2.7 in 2030.



The following graph compares the number of people of working age (25-64) to the number of people age 85+. Individuals age 85+ are more likely to be frail and in need of long term care services. In 1990, there were roughly 43 people of working age (25-64) for every one person age 85+. By 2040, it is expected that there will be roughly 15 people of working age for every one person age 85+.



Tompkins County’s 60+ population is predominantly Caucasian (94.7%); however the non-white population in Tompkins County grew between 2000 and 2010. Among those age 60+, Asian Americans now constitute the largest racial group in Tompkins County’s minority population, followed closely by African Americans. The language needs of these populations as well as the cultural competency of service providers are important considerations.

<b>Race of Tompkins County Older Adults (age 60+)</b>		
<b>Race</b>	<b>2000 Census</b>	<b>2010 Census</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>94.7%</b>
<b>African American</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
<b>Native American</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>
<b>Asian American</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>
<b>2 or More Races</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>
<b>Total Minority</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>
<b>Spanish Origin</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>

The 2010 Census reported that 5.5 % of Tompkins County’s older adults (60+) had incomes at or below poverty level. According to TCOFA’s 2012 Needs Assessment 29% of Tompkins County older adults were still employed: 59% full time and 41% part time. The data showed a 5% increase in employment between 2004 –2012, indicating that a growing number of workers are remaining engaged in full-time employed later in life.

TCOFA’s 2012 Needs Assessment indicated that 88% of Tompkins County’s older adults own their own homes. Of these homeowners, 50% indicate their home is in need of major repair and 38% indicate that the cost is prohibitive. TCOFA’s 2014 Housing Needs/Preferences survey showed that out of 331 respondents, nearly half plan on moving in the next 1-5 years, with the top reason being to reduce maintenance and downsize. The vast majority of respondents (90%) want to stay in Tompkins County. Consistent themes in the survey included the need for affordable housing options located in the City of Ithaca, close to services and public transportation. According to TCOFA’s 2012 Needs Assessment, 88% of older adults drive private vehicles as their main mode of transportation.

The most common self-reported health condition of older adults is arthritis, followed by high blood pressure, then eye problems. Fourteen percent report feeling anxious and 12% report feeling depressed; 23% report recently falling or are afraid of falling; 2% report that someone in the household has dementia. Ten percent report that they have not visited in person with anyone in the past week, and 14% don’t have a neighbor they feel they can call on if needed.

According to the “Under the Radar: The New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study” elder abuse is a widespread yet under-reported issue, with approximately 3.2 elder abuse cases reported for every thousand individuals age 65+ in Tompkins County. Financial exploitation is self-disclosed at a rate of 42 per every thousand individuals age 65+ in Tompkins County.

Though the majority of older adults are covered by Medicare, according to TCOFA's 2012 Needs Assessment, 13.4% have trouble understanding their insurance and fewer than half of those knew about local health insurance counseling programs that are available to assist them. Eighty-two percent of local older adults take prescription medications daily. Nearly 10% are not enrolled in insurance for prescriptions and 4% do not fill prescriptions or try to make them last longer because of cost.

The majority of Tompkins County's older population (95%) report having a doctor who coordinates their health care needs. Ninety-seven percent had visited their doctor within the last year, and only 2% reported that they had difficulty finding health care due to financial or accessibility problems.

Finally, according to TCOFA's 2012 Needs Assessment, Tompkins County's older adult population has access and utilizes technology to a great extent. Eighty-two percent of Tompkins County's older adults have computers with internet access; 80% of older adults have both landline and a cell phone.

**A summary of the findings and comments of the eight consensus conferences now follows:**

### **Overview of Strengths and Highlights (Generated from Consensus Conference participants)**

Tompkins County is a community driven by higher education. Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins-Cortland Community College are assets to our community, bringing youth, energy, ideas, collaboration and a strong economic base. Relative to much of Upstate New York, Tompkins County has a strong economy and low rate of unemployment. According to the Department of Labor, higher education accounts for more than 30% of all jobs in Tompkins County. The student population accounts for 30% of Tompkins County's total population. This influx in population is advantageous to public and non-profit service providers.

The Ithaca College Gerontology Institute (ICGI) and the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging (CITRA) offer research and training opportunities to the local aging network, and raise the level of knowledge about best practices in gerontology among local aging professionals. Both institutions have an emphasis on community service, and opportunities for inter-generational programming abound. Several hundred students work with local organizations and actively volunteer with local older adults on an annual basis.

Older adults in the community are focused on higher education as well, and many individuals describe themselves as "life-long learners." Tompkins County is home to large numbers of highly-educated older workers who hold professional positions at the colleges and university. Many individuals can remain in positions well into traditional retirement years because of the low physical demands. Upon retiring, the colleges offer workshops to employees on the transition to retirement, which include discussing local volunteer opportunities as many of these retirees desire to stay engaged and connected. Many of these potential volunteers are highly skilled and willing to use their expertise to

contribute to the local community. Tompkins County has a long history of political activism as well as philanthropy and offers a variety of opportunities for retirees and well elders to focus their talents.

Tompkins County is a well-networked community with a vast array of human services and other resources relative to its size. The Office for the Aging/ NY Connects and Human Services Coalition/211 provide information and assistance to link people to core services such as, Foodnet, Hospicare, Finger Lakes Independence Center, home care agencies, mental health services, and other long term care services. These in-home support services allow older adults to remain independent as long as possible. In addition to in-home supports, Tompkins County offers programs that promote wellness and involvement through Lifelong, Greater Ithaca Activities Center, the YMCA and other community organizations and businesses. The Tompkins County provider community has some degree of cultural competence and generally embraces diversity. This is beneficial to older adults and people with disabilities, who may have additional long term care and/or mental health needs.

In comparison to counties of similar size, Tompkins has an array of senior housing options, as well as an ability to inform people of their housing options through resources and technology. There are also many options for transportation, both public and private, that support safe affordable and green transportation. Gadabout and ADA Paratransit, FISH, TCAT, Lansing Van, Wheelchair accessible taxi service, and Ithaca Carshare are some of the options available to older adults and people with disabilities. In addition, there are organizations that provide resources to help people access transportation, including Cooperative Extension's Way2Go program.

### **Overview of Issues and Needs (Generated from Consensus Conference participants)**

Though our community has much strength on which to build, the questions remain: what do we need to change, improve, and create to provide for older adults now and in the future? How will current services and supports, housing, transportation and overall attitudes need to evolve to meet the demands placed by the aging of the Baby Boomers?

Many of today's 60 and older population, current and future Baby Boomers, do not self-identify as "senior citizens." They are known as an innovative, self-determined generation that will continue to forge ahead to retirement in the same fashion. Many have very specific and individual ideals and they want to design their own experiences. This is important on many levels and will inform how service providers have to change in order to effectively reach and serve the Baby Boom generation.

Many older adults choose to continue working well into traditional retirement years, either because of preference or out of economic necessity. However, there are some jobs where the physical demands are too strenuous to continue. Some retire and then find it necessary to reenter the workforce in order to make ends meet and pay for

medical care and expenses, home maintenance and/or rising taxes. With Tompkins County's low unemployment rate, there is competition for scarce jobs, and older workers may be forced to accept positions for much lower pay than their pre-retirement positions. There are biases against hiring older workers who may be perceived as less able to manage technology.

For those who have the ability to comfortably retire, opportunities for volunteerism and civic engagement will become even more desired. Local organizations need a strong infrastructure to recruit, train, support and retain volunteers, including people with disabilities, as well as, a person-centered approach to make the volunteer experiences positive. Often Baby Boomers are interested in experiences that meet their needs and interests rather than fitting within a job description. It is a challenge for organizations to align their needs with volunteers who want to share their knowledge and talents in ways that suit their interests. Volunteer opportunities need to be decentralized throughout Tompkins County so people don't perceive the City of Ithaca as the only place to get involved.

Many of the services that support the aging population and community in general are already operating with strained resources and limited funding. Not only do core programs need to be strengthened and sustained, they must be enhanced to meet current and future demands.

Transportation issues affect not only older adults but people of all ages in our rural community. The lack of transportation, especially in rural areas, creates barriers to services and medical care and puts older adults at risk for social isolation which can result in declining health. Same-day transportation service, out of county transportation to regional medical centers, after hours and weekend transportation are all needed. It is difficult to recruit and retain volunteer drivers to support transportation programs such as Gadabout and Friends in Service Help (FISH). Accessibility of transportation options needs to be considered when developing affordable senior and mixed use housing.

The lack of affordable housing in Tompkins County was mentioned consistently across each Consensus Conference. In 2014, the City of Ithaca's housing vacancy rate was 0.5% when a healthy rate is typically considered 5%. The lack of housing drives housing costs higher. Our community needs a greater supply of affordable housing that serves all generations and creates living environments that enable people. There is an additional challenge of integrating people with severe and persistent mental illness into senior housing. The type of housing, the built environment, the affordability and location are issues that will directly affect the ability for people to continue living at home as they age.

There is a lack of affordable assisted living options in Tompkins County, with no Medicaid-funded assisted living option available. Because of this, some persons with dementia and others whose long term care needs do not rise to the level of skilled nursing care are prematurely placed in skilled nursing facilities. Some elders who cannot afford local assisted living options have to stay at home in unsafe conditions or seek other



affordable assisted living options out-of-county. Strict New York State assisted living regulations limit the facilities from assisting residents with basic needs, thereby forcing people who need a small amount of assistance to move to another level of care. In addition, skilled nursing facilities are hard-pressed to provide adequate care for people with dementia and those with psychotic behaviors. Care for people exhibiting these behaviors tends to bounce back and forth between the hospital and nursing homes.

The current medical, mental health and long term care systems are fractured, difficult for older adults to navigate, and stretched thin in terms of resources. These systems are not person-centered, rather they are primarily driven by income/payer source. Individuals are often forced into various systems based on income. Insurance costs and the skyrocketing costs for medical care are a concern for many and even more of burden as people retire and employers are cutting retiree health coverage. Retirees who are not yet age 65 and eligible for Medicare have difficulty affording health insurance. Those on Medicare have a hard time finding local physicians who accept new patients. There is a lack of geriatricians in Tompkins County. Medicaid is currently transitioning to managed long term care across New York State, and there is concern that services will not be granted at the same level as previous fee-for-service Medicaid. People with reasonable resources cannot afford to pay privately for long term care assistance for very long.

Social isolation is an issue for older adults in our rural community, and with families often living at far distances from one another, there are fewer adult children available to provide care and companionship. For older adults living alone, without regular social supports, the early and intermediate stages of cognitive decline are difficult to detect until a significant event occurs. In these cases where capacity is in question, it is difficult for service providers to intervene.

People who currently need in-home aide service struggle to find available aides, and as the older population increases, the lack of home health aides and certified nursing assistants will only be greater. As the demographics indicate that those age 25-44 are far fewer than those age 60+, there simply will not be enough young or middle aged adults to provide the support needed by older adults. Contributing factors to the lack of aides are low pay, lack of local training and cumbersome regulations to offer training. Currently there is only one certified home health agency in Tompkins County. Not only does this limit availability but it raises issues around consumer choice. The shortage of aides in the workforce places more burdens on families and informal caregivers, leading to burnout and an increased need for respite care. As frail, possibly cognitively impaired elders need more assistance and become more isolated, they are more vulnerable to abuse and financial exploitation.

## **Overview of Recommendations (Generated from Consensus Conference participants)**

### **Information/Public Education/Community Outreach**

- Conduct a comprehensive public education/ information campaign on aging-related issues, using a variety of technologies, with messaging that speaks to Baby Boomers. Consider the unique issues and needs of various groups residing within Tompkins County including rural residents, various racial and ethnic identities, and the LGBT community. The campaign should incorporate the following components:
  - Financial planning/ planning for retirement
  - Money management
  - Long term care options
  - Health insurance and long term care insurance, health insurance counseling programs, EPIC
  - Caregiving and self care
  - Transportation options, including improvements and accommodations made by transportation providers to the older population (e.g., wheelchair accessible buses). Use peers to spread information to people who are having transportation difficulties.
  - New paradigms for aging, including community-building to enable aging in place.
  - Practical information about scams, magazine subscriptions, and solicitation by charities. Engage physicians, lawyers, law enforcement and other trusted sources to present the information. Delivery methods may include: televised messages, stickers to put on telephones, a checklist that offer simple concrete guidelines.
  - Targeted information to employers about challenges of elder caregiving; services for retirees and current employees who are caregivers (including Medicare counseling, volunteer opportunities)
  - Outreach to publicize resources for older adults through the clinically integrated network of medical providers and Guthrie using methods such as posters in practitioner offices. Utilize the Finger Lakes Office Managers Association, which meets monthly and represents different practices in the Cayuga Area Preferred (CAP) network, to distribute information about programs and to access other offices as a resource.
  - Training for staff of financial institutions to recognize signs of elder financial exploitation or related problems.
  - Continue local presentations by the Attorney General's Office and Cornell Cooperative Extension staff on the range of scams and frauds.
  - Education to the Tompkins County Legislature about housing market and the needs and preferences of older citizens.

## **Civic Engagement/Volunteerism/Education**

- Explore the “Age Friendly Community” designation for Tompkins County as a framework for broad community engagement and continual improvement in relation to aging. Utilize college students to conduct a cost/benefit analysis of what can be easily changed to make Tompkins County a more livable community. Enlist students in conducting an inventory and analysis related to existing housing stock and support services to determine where there are gaps.
- Support and encourage volunteerism and civic engagement among older adults. Provide a clearinghouse and one-stop location for volunteer opportunities. Encourage organizations to enable volunteers to design and create their own volunteer experience based upon their skills and interests. Allow options for short-term volunteer opportunities that are self-directed and flexible. Decentralize educational, volunteer and different types of civic engagement opportunities throughout the County so that more people can participate.
- Explore models of volunteerism as a means to meet the needs of older adults in the community. For instance, explore the use of trained EMS volunteers who are willing to assist with many basic needs of community elders such as in-home assessments and care.
- Recruit both the young and older as volunteers, with special attention to encouraging adults in early retirement (Baby Boomers) to volunteer.
- Engage the collective talent and skills of the young and elderly so that they can get help when they need it. Volunteer programs which involve collecting credits should be considered.
- Consider adopting the Independent Transportation Network (ITN) Everywhere model of credits for volunteer drivers, time banking, converting cars into credits for purchasing alternative transportation. Ithaca Carshare may serve as a bridge to retiring from driving. If members drive as a volunteer in their early senior years, perhaps they could build up "credit" for being driven after they can no longer drive.
- Explore possibility of blanket insurance coverage for county for volunteers at multiple agencies—or possibly a county-wide program that would distribute the cost of insurance and allow more volunteers to participate (without their private insurance carrier having to worry about the driver’s efficacy and safety). Such a county program might also purchase fuel or offer other coordination/efficiencies.

## **Medical Care, Long Term Care, Mental Health**

- Continue to shift the focus from “payer-directed care” to “person-directed care”
- Advocate for Medicaid funded assisted living options in Tompkins County. Support additional affordable assisted living residential alternatives all levels of need (including for low income and middle income).
- Advocate for the development of more options for secure, affordable dementia care in Tompkins County.
- Advocate for a medical model day program in Tompkins County as an option to help prevent caregivers from being spread too thin.
- Advocate for the integration of mental and medical health. Advocate for a treatment program in Tompkins County for those dually diagnosed with mental illness and chemical dependency. Advocate for a detox center that is able to respond to those with psychiatric behaviors and offers treatment possibilities.
- Secure funding to open additional congregate meal sites in Tompkins County, creating opportunities for people to eat and socialize, listen to speakers, and obtain access to information and services.
- Encourage more geriatricians to provide services in Tompkins County.
- Elevate the way our community values and honors personal care aides on a professional level, including how they are treated, as well as the income, benefits and training they receive. Explore a community training program to increase the supply of licensed aides.
- Explore local bartering systems, alternative currencies, time banking and/or time trading as potential options for providing care for elders. Encourage broader discussion and outreach across different populations within the community.
- Promote the “seniors helping seniors” concept through supporting the establishment of a “village” in Tompkins County. Ensure that it is structured, managed and has continuity to provide reliable assistance. Consider this model as a way of meeting the long term care needs of elders while providing viable employment opportunities for aides and/or maintenance workers.
- Expand intergenerational opportunities. Use the younger generation as a resource for teaching older adults about technology and its uses.
- Formalize a multidisciplinary team to address elder abuse issues, including staff from Adult Protective Services, the District Attorney, and law enforcement in

- Expand funding and delivery of respite and friendly visitor services.

### **Transportation**

- Secure additional sources of revenue to meet the growing demand for transportation services. Encourage businesses and medical providers to help pay for transportation provided to their clients.
- Enhance the capacity of existing transportation services to provide after-hour, weekend, and same-day urgent medical transportation service for needs that don't rise to level of a 911 call (e.g., getting needed medication). Explore the feasibility of partnering with existing commercial transportation during off hours (e.g., limousines, school buses) to increase services.
- Develop more affordable transportation options for out-of-county medical appointments.
- Explore more regional and multi-county solutions so that residents in rural areas can get to locations in neighboring counties
- Develop central coordination for handling array of requests for transportation.
- Develop a better system for handling transportation needs of people after outpatient treatment (e.g., dialysis).
- Support aging drivers and those retiring from driving. Develop ways people can have their driving skills assessed.

### **Housing**

- Increase the supply of housing in order to reduce housing costs in Tompkins County.
- Develop a coalition or mechanism to disseminate accurate information and to have other voices heard when discussion of new development takes place in the community. Develop a mechanism to counteract the anti-development mentality in some communities.
- Streamline the approval process for new housing development.
- Encourage inter-municipal dialogue to facilitate housing development efforts on behalf of seniors.

- Advocate for accessible design in new housing, making it desirable and safe for seniors and people of all ages.
- Cluster housing around services and change the zoning, if needed, to make this possible.
- Insure that transportation needs and options are considered when new housing is developed for older adults.

## **Conclusion**

The recommendations in this document will inform efforts of the Tompkins County Office for the Aging in addressing the needs of older adults over the coming years. Several efforts are already underway in the community. We encourage public and private entities and community groups to utilize this planning document to inform decision-making in relation to the needs of the older adult population. Through a thoughtful planning process which is both ongoing and collaborative, we strive to be a community that welcomes and supports people as they age.

If you have questions, comments or additions to this document, or if you are interested in participating in efforts to improve the lives of older adults in the community, please contact the Tompkins County Office for the Aging through our website: [www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)