



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

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**TO:** Area Agency on Aging Directors

**FROM:** Joyce Massey-Smith

**DATE:** July 14, 2023

**SUBJECT: PRIORITIZING EQUITY IN THE STATE AGING PLAN AND AREA PLANS**

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is pleased to present the 2023-2027 North Carolina State Aging Plan as required by N.C.G.S. 143B-181.1A and Section 307 of the federal Older Americans Act (42 U.S.C. § 3027). The Division of Aging and Adult Services and its many partners have spent the past year gathering comments and ideas from citizens statewide about the needs of our growing and ever changing older adult population. The Plan, **AdvaNCing Equity in Aging**, will help further engage and serve our older adult population and citizens over the next four years.

By centering on equity throughout the plan, the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) commits to cultivating inclusive aging communities, promoting fair access to services and opportunities, recognizing the social determinants of health to address disparities, and engaging people from historically marginalized populations in decision-making. This commitment, along with a focus on the Department's priorities – strong and inclusive workforce, child and family well-being, and behavioral health and resilience – will guide our efforts as we work collaboratively with stakeholders and communities to implement strategies that promote equitable access for diverse aging populations throughout our state.

I wanted to take a moment to emphasize the importance of prioritizing equity in the development of the State Aging Plan and subsequently your Area Plans. I believe we are at a time where we must underscore the significance of incorporating equity as a guiding principle throughout our planning processes. As we have fought for years to highlight the inequities among the overall aging population, we must acknowledge and embrace the diversity within the population.

Equity lies at the heart of our mission to serve older adults in North Carolina. It requires us to examine the disparities that exist among different populations and work diligently to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to the services and support they need to age with dignity and well-being.

By prioritizing equity, we are actively addressing the systemic barriers that perpetuate disparities in healthcare, human services, housing, and more. Our commitment to equity means that we are dedicated to reaching those who are often marginalized or face additional challenges in accessing the resources they require.

**NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF AGING AND ADULT SERVICES**

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

It is crucial that we engage in a comprehensive approach to equity, considering factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and geographic location. We must proactively seek out input from diverse communities and ensure their voices are heard and valued in the planning and decision-making processes.

To effectively prioritize equity, I encourage all teams and stakeholders involved in the development of the Area Plans to:

- **Conduct a thorough assessment:** Identify existing disparities and gaps in services and determine the specific needs of underserved populations within our community. Reach out to us for assistance with data needs.
- **Collaborate with community partners:** Forge strong partnerships with community organizations, advocacy groups, and individuals with lived experiences. Their insights and expertise will be invaluable in shaping our strategies and initiatives.
- **Develop targeted strategies:** Create specific action plans to address the identified disparities and ensure that our programs and services are accessible, culturally competent, and responsive to the unique needs of all individuals.
- **Foster an inclusive culture:** Cultivate an environment where diversity, equity, and inclusion are embraced at all levels of our division. Encourage ongoing training and professional development to enhance our cultural competency and awareness of implicit biases.
- **Monitor and evaluate progress:** Regularly assess the impact of our initiatives and make data-informed decisions to ensure that our efforts are making a positive difference in promoting equity and reducing disparities.

As we embark on this important journey to implement the State Aging Plan and develop the Area Plans, I invite each of you to actively participate and contribute your valuable insights. Your expertise and dedication are essential in shaping a future where every older adult in our community has an equal opportunity to thrive and age with dignity.

Thank you for your commitment to our mission and for your efforts in prioritizing equity. Together, we can create lasting change and improve the lives of older adults across our state.

JMS/DV/pg