

NYSOFA News



November 2008
Volume 2, #5

A newsletter for everyone who cares about older persons



Governor Paterson issued a proclamation on Oct. 24 declaring November as Caregivers' Month

Reza Mizbani photo

Governor Paterson: November is Caregivers' Month

Governor David A. Paterson proclaimed November as Caregivers' Month in New York State, and called on all New Yorkers to recognize the significant contributions made by caregivers throughout the year.

Unpaid caregivers provide care and assistance to those who need help to remain in their homes and communities of choice. The contributions they make to society, and most importantly to the loved ones for whom they care, are important to recognize throughout the year, but especially during Caregivers' Month. Director Burgess has pledged to bring the voices of caregivers from across the State to Albany. Several Town Hall Meetings on Caregiver Issues have been held with more locations throughout New York being planned for the future. The Town Hall Meetings, several of which took place during the past year, are held in cooperation with the New York State Family Caregiver Council that NYSOFA oversees. The Town Hall Meetings give caregivers an opportunity to share their interests and needs with the Director and the Family Caregiver Council. The Council is responsible for developing policy and program recommendations to help caregivers.

In recognizing Caregivers' Month in New York, Director Burgess said, "In order to maintain and sustain the efforts of caregivers in New York, we must be

sensitive to, and work to address needs of caregivers so that they can continue to provide the assistance they so much want to provide to their loved ones. We need to hear from caregivers about what they want and need in order to help them to sustain their role as caregivers." Caregivers dedicate an average of 20 hours per week to the provision of care and even more time when caring for someone with multiple disabilities. Almost one-third of all caregivers are balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, making their efforts even more difficult to maintain.

It is estimated that there are more than 2.2 million unpaid caregivers in New York State and these caregivers provide the majority of long term care assistance to frail, older residents and adults with disabilities. Without the care provided by these dedicated caregivers, many older New Yorkers would likely be placed in an institutional setting or nursing home, sometimes miles away from their homes and family members. The financial effect of the care provided by caregivers is enormous. Without the care provided by these unpaid caregivers, costly institutionalization may be the only option for those they care for. At an average cost of \$9,000 per month, most individuals placed in nursing homes ultimately transfer to the government financed Medicaid program.

Vision rehab helps seniors “age in community”

by Nancy D. Miller, President
New York Vision Rehabilitation Association

How common is it for seniors to have diminished vision as they age? Trouble focusing up close, a need for more light, discomfort with glare, a harder time distinguishing similar colors, “floaters” and taking longer to adjust to moving between dark and light... these are normal changes as you age. However, more than 20 % of seniors experience eye diseases that effect not only seeing but with functioning independently at home, at work or in the community.

It is essential for seniors to have an eye exam including having your eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) dilate your pupils to examine the back of the eye for changes. Your eye doctor will test your eyes for glaucoma, a problem with the pressure in the eye, and look for signs of changes due to diabetes or macular degeneration. Your eye doctor may also detect the growth of cataracts that in most cases can be removed safely.

You may be bumping into objects, squinting, having difficulty recognizing faces, spilling or missing food on your plate. If you notice that your vision is changing it is critical that you see an eye specialist as soon as possible. Unfortunately, many seniors neglect this important step and unnecessarily lose vision to treatable eye diseases.

Once the eye specialist has diagnosed and treated any eye disease, what happens next can influence how long you remain at home, in familiar surroundings, and living independently.

Have you heard of vision rehabilitation services? Most seniors say they have not and vision rehabilitation services are largely underutilized. If you have difficulty

seeing or can see hardly at all (partial sight, low vision or legal blindness), vision rehabilitation services help you learn new ways to do the things you have always done. People with moderate to severe vision loss work, take care of the house, shop, cook, babysit grandchildren, mow the lawn, wash the car...in fact seniors with vision loss can do almost everything that a fully sighted senior can do. It does take time to learn the specialized techniques and adapted equipment and to adjust to this new “you.” Thousands of seniors in New York State have been successful and you can be too.

Where do you start? There are nonprofit agencies in New York State that provide vision rehabilitation services. Although generally vision rehabilitation services are not covered by Medicaid and Medicare, the agencies offer free or low cost services that are paid for through the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, other government funding, foundation grants, demonstration projects, Lions Clubs or other sources. Some services may be familiar to you such as meeting with a social worker to talk about your situation and adjust to the changes in your vision. Other services may not be familiar such as learning to get around safely using a prescribed cane with a certified orientation and mobility specialist; learning to cook, clean or mark your medications with a certified vision rehabilitation therapist, or using specially fitted and prescribed optical aids from a low vision eye specialist. Independence is just a phone call away.

For more information about the nearest vision rehabilitation agency in your area, call the New York State Office For the Aging Hotline 1-800-342-9871

Older New Yorkers reminded of pending cable changes

Congress mandated the conversion to all-digital television broadcasting, also known as the digital television (DTV) transition, because all-digital broadcasting will free up frequencies for public safety communications (such as police, fire, and emergency rescue). Also, digital is a more efficient transmission technology that allows broadcast stations to offer improved picture and sound quality, as well as offer more programming options for consumers through multiple broadcast streams (multicasting). What you need to do depends on the source of your television programming, whether you receive programming over-the-air or from a paid provider such as a cable or satellite TV company.

After February 17, 2009, you will be able to receive and view over-the-air digital programming with an analog TV only by purchasing a digital-to-analog set-top converter box. Between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, all U.S. households as well as long term care facility residents will be able to request a coupon, worth \$40 each, to be used toward the future purchase of eligible digital-to-analog converter boxes.

For more information, go to www.dtv.gov, or contact the FCC’s Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322).

Director's Corner

Director Michael J. Burgess



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In this issue you will read about the recently held “Empowering Communities for Successful Aging” conference convened by NYSOFA and several of our partners. The conference was our



keystone effort to assist civic leaders in planning for and addressing the needs of the rapidly increasing older population. I am hopeful that the conference will serve as a watershed in stimulating important discussions among stakeholders that will lead to local action in communities across the state. I plan to keep these efforts going by continuing to work with our partners to follow up in each region of the state.

We know that the recent downturn in our economy has many implications and difficult times are likely ahead as we work to insure the well-being of all New York residents, especially those most vulnerable. It is now, more important than ever, to find ways of working together, collaborating on joint projects, and sharing successful programs and models for replication in other locales. Our web site will be a location where you can keep up to date on the progress being made on the Empowering Communities initiative, so please take a look.

As we approach the holiday season, and with November being designated by Governor Paterson as Caregivers’ Month in New York, I want to acknowledge the efforts made by all those who have in the past, or are currently engaged in a caregiving role. Unpaid caregivers play a vital role in helping family members, friends and neighbors remain in their homes and communities of choice. While their work goes on tirelessly throughout the year, we should all take time to recognize these caregivers and seek ways to help them with their responsibilities and tasks so that they can take a break.



Proclamation

Whereas, New Yorkers are well known for their compassion for their fellow human beings and, today, there are an estimated 2.2 million New Yorkers serving as “caregivers” who provide approximately 80% of the long term care for family members and other loved ones who are chronically ill, elderly, or disabled; and

Whereas, family caregivers are not only formal family members but often friends, neighbors or others who tend to individuals in matters of personal assistance, providing help with such tasks as bathing, dressing and grooming, as well as shopping, cooking and cleaning; and

Whereas, the need for family caregivers is rising and will continue to grow as the life expectancy increases and New York’s population of aging citizens lives longer; and

Whereas, the concept of caring for those with special needs reflects family and community values at the highest levels, as family caregivers provide a truly valuable service that allows many New Yorkers to remain in their homes and communities of choice rather than seek care in an institutional setting; and

Whereas, individuals engaged in family care giving should have our support and assistance as they face challenges affecting their own health, finances, and job security; and

Whereas, family caregivers deserve our gratitude and respect for their efforts as they must often balance their responsibilities to their immediate families with their jobs – and while there are demands in caring for others, they remain selfless in sharing themselves and their personal time with those in their care; and

Whereas, November is National Family Caregivers’ Month, providing an opportunity for New Yorkers to join with all Americans in recognizing those who ensure compassionate care and sustenance for many family, friends and loved ones who, themselves, appreciate the kindness and respect shown by their caregivers which enables them to live with the dignity we all deserve;

Now, Therefore, I, David A. Paterson, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby proclaim November 2008 as

CAREGIVERS’ MONTH

in the Empire State.



Given under my hand and the Privy Seal of the State at the Capitol in the City of Albany this twentieth day of October in the year two thousand eight.

GOVERNOR

Secretary to the Governor

**Call the
 New York State Office for
 the Aging Helpline at
 1-800-342-9871**

Governor Launches HeatSmartNY

New Public Outreach Campaign will Include Website, Hotline, Workshops and Public Service Announcements

New Yorkers facing skyrocketing home heating costs have new tools and assistance to get through this coming winter. Eight New York State agencies and authorities have collaborated to address this vital issue and bring relief to New York's most at-risk residents.

At Lifelong Senior Center in Ithaca, Tompkins County, Governor Paterson was joined by Congressman Maurice Hinchey, State Senator George Winner and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton in unveiling the new campaign, which will include a website (www.HeatSmartNY.org), a hotline number (877-NY-SMART), public service announcements and a series of 630 statewide workshops to provide consumers with easy, do-it-yourself tips to lower heating bills, as well as information about New York's heating-related programs.

"While we remain focused on reducing spending to address the economic downturn, we must at the same time be mindful that for many New York families, this is going to be an especially harsh and difficult winter," said Governor Paterson. "New Yorkers should not be endangered by falling temperatures and rising heating costs. That is why I have directed these agencies to implement collaborative and coordinated outreach and ensure that New Yorkers have as much information as possible about heating-related programs and ways to reduce home heating costs."

Additionally, Governor Paterson announced the award of \$3.5 million in federal grants to low-income New Yorkers for the installation of energy efficiency measures in 1,205 homes. The grants, awarded by the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), will enable weatherization agencies across New York to address unmet energy efficiency needs in their communities. A complete list of awards can be found at www.nysdhcr.gov.

State Senator George Winner said: "I can't say enough about this comprehensive effort by Governor Paterson to focus New York government's attention on home heating costs. It's timely, it's urgent, and it's going to be a true lifeline for many senior citizens and families locally and across the State."



Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton said: "Collaboration between these eight agencies to ensure New Yorkers receive the information and assistance they need about help with heating costs is a good first step towards protecting the most vulnerable among us from the dangers of a cold winter. My colleagues and I in the Assembly have consistently fought to provide affordable heating options to those who need it." The participating agencies include: the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), the Public

Service Commission (PSC), the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), the New York Power Authorities (NYPA), the Consumer Protection Board (CPB), the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), the Office for the Aging (OFA), and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

New York State has worked on a number of fronts to improve energy efficiency and provide additional assistance to help lower energy bills this winter, including:

- The income eligibility levels for New York's Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) have been increased to reflect increases in the State's median income level. A family of four earning as much as \$45,312 annually may qualify for HEAP in 2008-09;
- An increase in HEAP's regular and emergency benefits to \$800 for delivered fuel customers, to enable them to purchase a minimum delivery of fuel, and raising the maximum regular benefit to \$585 for all other customers;
- Waiving HEAP's face-to-face application requirement for most applicants for emergency benefits, allowing them to file for those benefits over the phone;
- An emergency utility summit held by the PSC to discuss utility budget billing programs, community outreach efforts and other options for making bill



NYSOFA Director Michael Burgess with Governor David Paterson at the kick off of the HeatSmartNY campaign in Ithaca.

Tim Kovarik photos

Aging (OFA), and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

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- An emergency utility summit held by the PSC

to discuss utility budget billing programs, community outreach efforts and other options for making bill

payment easier, and consider enhancements to termination policies to reduce the likelihood of service disruptions during cold weather months;

- A \$32 million increase in the amount of low-income funding, approved by the PSC and provided by local utility companies and NYSERDA, to improve the energy efficiency of homes. NYSERDA will also spend an additional \$2 million this winter to help more New Yorkers reduce their energy use and keep their homes heated;
- \$18.8 million for energy efficiency in the Con Edison and National Grid gas service territories; this funding, approved by the PSC, will help to reduce natural gas bills for New York families, particularly low-income households, this winter;
- A \$5 million “Weatherization Blitz” offered by NYPA to customers served by municipal electric systems throughout Upstate New York. NYPA will distribute “do-it-yourself” kits and energy savings tip sheets to residents

Community Empowerment Conference:

NYSOFA's vision a success with attendees

NYSOFA co-sponsored a two-day conference with AARP and New York Association of Homes & Services for the Aging titled *Empowering Communities for Successful Aging; Housing, Neighborhood Supports and Services*, which was held at the Saratoga Hilton and Conference Center on November 12 and 13.

Produced by the Albany Guardian Society, the event included more than 50 workshops and 100 presenters. The interest and need for such an event was evidenced by over 475 conference registrants from across NYS, maxing out the capacity of the venue.

Presenters offered information and assistance on creating and enhancing elder friendly communities and addressed areas such as housing alternatives, supportive services, civic engagement, zoning and land use, grass roots organizing and financing options. The attendees reached far beyond just the aging field and included community leaders, housing directors, not-for profits, faith-based organizations, elected officials, builders and community planners; demonstrating the interest and support for promoting elder friendly communities.

After keynote speaker Mae Carpenter, Commissioner of Westchester County Department of Senior Programs

and Services, provided an example of how Westchester County has successfully taken steps to become a livable community, a regional break-out session was held. The regional breakout session had more than 200 participants networking and taking the beginning steps toward collaborating to promote elder friendly communities. More than 100 individuals from across the state have volunteered to act as leaders with NYSOFA to promote follow-up activities spurred by the conference. Regional training and a conference tool-kit are items NYSOFA is now working to create post-conference.

A NYAHS member who attended the conference said: *"I found the conference to be one of the most useful conferences I've ever attended. The information presented was relevant, timely, and practical. I left there with a true sense of what needs to be done to create senior housing, how to do it locally and who the key players are. I have to admit, the outlook for senior housing is not always good and I learned some grim truths to the system. But from my perspective this is helpful in assessing the needs and determining next steps and future goals."*

State Society on Aging Honors Burgess

On Thursday, October 23, Michael J. Burgess, Director of the New York State Office for the Aging was presented the Walter M. Beattie, Jr. Award at the 36th annual meeting of the New York State Society on Aging [SSA], held in Saratoga Springs, NY.

The Walter M. Beattie Jr. is awarded to an individual for outstanding contributions to gerontology and commitment to the work in the state and society. The State Society on Aging of New York is a multidisciplinary society founded in 1972 as the New York State Association of Gerontological Educators (NY SAGE). For the past thirty six years, it has provided leadership in the field of aging, especially in promoting gerontology and geriatrics education.

The State Society on Aging members represent a range

of disciplines including educators, older adults, health and social service professionals, advocates for the elderly, community leaders from the public and private sectors, administrators in acute and long term care, researchers, government officials, policy makers, and students.

Upon receiving the award, Director Burgess noted, "It is indeed an honor to receive this award, so named for one of the most outstanding gerontologists of our time, and a gentleman who worked his entire adult life to advance the study of aging with a goal of improving the lives of older persons across all boundaries."

For more information about the State Society on Aging, visit www.ssany.org

NYSOFA Staff Finds A Cause Worth Running For

NYSOFA staff competed in 5th Annual Run for Recovery on September 16, 2005. This marks the fifth year that SOFA has fielded teams in the Run, which celebrates the hope of recovery from addiction through healthy competition. The 2-mile relay race is comprised of OASAS licensed treatment and prevention providers and New York State agencies.



Mark Acencio photo

ALERT: Chimney Scam Targets Seniors in Southern NY

There has been a new scam developing in the southern counties of New York State. The county consumer affairs departments have been plagued by unscrupulous chimney companies. These companies advertise that they will clean your chimney for a very nominal cost, \$39.95 or \$49.95. When they arrive at your home they will soon inform you that you need a chimney liner which generally costs about \$1500.00. Sales pressure tactics are extreme to the point where residents have been told that they are fortunate that no fire has occurred or carbon monoxide fumes have entered the home with grave consequences. For more information call 1-800-771-7755.



*My Health.
My Medicare.*

Medicare Open Enrollment Begins November 15th *Plans Change. You change. Shop and Compare.*

Each year plans adjust what they cost and what they cover. Now is the time for people with Medicare to review the changes being made by their current plan and compare it to others to make sure it still meets their needs. Those who don't have prescription drug coverage can also enroll in a drug plan during open enrollment.

Some beneficiaries may see significant premium increases or changes—such as reduced coverage in the gap—if they stay in the same prescription drug plan in 2009. Medicare encourages individual beneficiaries to review how their plans are changing and what other options are available.

There are four ways to review and compare plans:

1. **Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227, TTY 1-877-486-2048).** 24 hour help is available from trained Medicare representatives.
2. **Visit www.medicare.gov.** Compare costs, coverage and more. Get an estimate of your out-of-pocket costs for the year.
3. **See the listing of plans in your Medicare & You handbook** and information sent to you by your plan.
4. **Talk with local Medicare experts** at your State Health Insurance Assistance Program.

People with Medicare should also be aware of Medicare fraud and identity theft. To help protect Medicare beneficiaries when speaking with plans and others about their Medicare prescription drug coverage, Medicare urges them to protect their Medicare number as they would their credit card information. People with Medicare should not give their information to anyone who comes to their home (or calls them) uninvited selling Medicare-related products. If you or someone you love is not sure if a provider is approved by Medicare, simply call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Important Medicare Enrollment Dates:

Nov 15—Open Enrollment Begins

Enroll as soon as possible – the sooner the better – to avoid any inconvenience at the pharmacy counter in January.

Dec 31—Open Enrollment Ends

Jan 1—Coverage Begins

This message brought to you by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Visit NYSOFA's new web site at www.aging.ny.gov

NYSOFA Awarded Two AoA Grants

The New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) announced it has received two significant grant awards from the Administration on Aging (AoA) to assess the quality of services provided to older New Yorkers and their caregivers, and to estimate cost savings associated with home and community based services in assisting older people to delay or avoid nursing home placement.

One award, the Advanced Performance Outcomes Measures Project (POMP), enables New York, for a fourth year, to systematically develop and refine performance outcome measures that can quantify aging network program impacts and estimate costs saving to the public funds. The second award, the Next Generation: POMP, is a multi-year project designed to develop and prepare a toolkit for helping state and local programs to assess the quality of services, identify strategies for quality improvement, and optimize the value of outcome results. It will also build on the work of previous POMP demonstrations to continue enhancing performance

measurement capability of state units on aging (SUAs), area agencies on aging (AAA), and service providers throughout the aging network.

Local partners receiving grants for the 2008 Advanced POMP demonstration include: Broome County Office for the Aging, Chautauqua County Office for the Aging, Erie County Department of Senior Services, Tompkins County Office for the Aging, and Finger Lakes Geriatric Education Center. Local partners participating in the 2008 Next Generation: POMP demonstration include the Chautauqua County Office for the Aging, Erie County Department of Senior Services, Tompkins County Office for the Aging, and the Finger Lakes Geriatric Education Center.

For additional information on this project, contact I-Hsin Wu, Project Director at the New York State Office for the Aging.



Alex Hyatt photo

Recent *Aging and You* program centers on volunteerism

Volunteer Betty Lemure is featured in NYSOFA's *Aging & You* television program titled "Volunteers: Helping Communities Thrive." The program will be broadcast on public access channels across the state in December. Check your local listings for more information.

NYSOFA*News*

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Our sole purpose is to improve communications between all components of the aging network within New York State and to work toward improving the lives of older persons everywhere. Feel free to copy and distribute this publication.

David A. Paterson
 Governor

Michael J. Burgess
 Director

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