

WVFACT – A Brief Summary

The West Virginia Partnership for Elder Living (WVPEL) and AARP West Virginia recently formed a coalition to start an important and ambitious project. We have convened a group of some of the most knowledgeable and best thinking people in the state in the fields related to aging and disability. This diverse group is meeting monthly to examine the entire system of services and care for seniors and other adults who utilize those programs and services. Our goal is to acknowledge the imminent changes we must face, acknowledge what is working and what is not, and co-create an ideal system for West Virginians who need care. We're calling it **WVFACT – The West Virginia Future of Aging and Caregiving Taskforce.**

To summarize the current situation with the senior service system, a white paper was developed, “The Senior Boom: The Future of West Virginia’s Senior Citizens” that documents the current snapshot of what “is” and states the challenges to the system:

1. The population of seniors is growing faster than any other segment and in our state this group is going to be more dominant faster than in most any other state.
2. The elder population is changing with a very fast growing subgroup: people 85 and older - seniors who generally need more care and more services; along with the “Boomers” who are turning 65 at the rate of 500 per week in West Virginia.
3. The systems of the past few decades-that have served our elders and other adults who need services have relied on funding that is unable to keep up with the growing needs. With the predicted increase in the numbers of people needing services or programs, even the status quo will not be sustainable without developing new approaches to meet the system's demands.

Utilizing a unique process of change management, Appreciative Inquiry, we will identify the best of the current system and generate ideas, pathways and practices, envisioning new models of service to seniors that fit the realities of today and tomorrow. Members and staff will do research on systems – foreign and domestic – as well as brain-storming and consensus building. Facilitating our process, are Alice Ruhnke and Trish Hatfield who were trained in Appreciative Inquiry at Case Western Reserve University by the actual founders of the process.

A total of 69 people from a wide variety of backgrounds with expertise in the overall aging field – including housing, long term care, physicians, academia and government agencies, have been invited to participate. All 69 expressed support for FACT and most have attended or been represented at one or more of our meetings. Legislative support includes the Chairs of the West Virginia Senate and House of Delegates Health Committees, Dr. Ron Stollings and Don Perdue, as well as the Chair of the House Committee on PEIA, Seniors, and Long Term Care, Larry Williams.

As we have discussed in FACT meetings, the issue is not just about how to get through the “aging of the boomers”; it is about a permanent change in how we live. The world and its people are and will be far different than when the current system was designed. The purpose of FACT is to imagine what that new world will be like and how the system could be redesigned for the new realities. We will search for the upside of the Senior Boom and envision new models that can later be converted into concrete policy

For more information on FACT, contact Phil Schenk, Director of WVPEL at pschenk@wvpel.org.

Planning for this project was done by the following committee:

Phil Schenk, WVPEL; Gaylene Miller, Executive Director AARP West Virginia

Dr. Shirley Neitch, Marshall University/Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine;

Jane Marks, Sandwich Caring; Nancy Tyler, Home Care Association; Angela Vance, AARP