UNITED WAY OF THE FRANKLIN & HAMPSHIRE REGION
Media Release

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United Way of the Franklin & Hampshire Region Awarded Funding to Expand Digital Equity Program for Older Adults

Grant will help close the digital divide and address social determinants of health for older adults in Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region

Greenfield, MA [Sept. 9, 2026] — United Way of the Franklin & Hampshire Region (UWFH) announced that it has been selected as a 2026 awardee of the Massachusetts Community Health & Healthy Aging Funds. The Funds, administered through a partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Executive Office of Aging & Independence, and Health Resources in Action, awarded more than $17.1 million to 30 organizations across the Commonwealth. Selected from a competitive pool of 182 applicants requesting more than $89 million in funding, UWFH will receive $472,845 over five years to strengthen and expand its Franklin County Healthy Aging Digital Equity Program.

The work will focus on older adults and caregivers across Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region, a rural area where nearly three in ten residents are age 60 or older. And it will contribute to broader efforts to address the root causes of health inequities through lasting policy, systems, and environmental change.

UWFH's commitment to digital equity began well before the launch of its Digital Navigator program. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, United Way of the Franklin and Hampshire Region was a founding member of the Alliance for Digital Equity, helping assess the region's digital divide and build a coordinated response to gaps in internet access, devices, and digital skills. Since then, UWFH has worked with the Alliance for Digital Equity, TEK Collaborative, and other regional partners to expand access to technology, distributing more than a thousand mobile hotspots, iPads, Chromebooks, laptops, and computers to nonprofit and municipal organizations across the region. Some of these devices go directly to community members most in need, through hotspot lending programs and device giveaways, while others strengthen the technology partner organizations use to serve the public.

Building on that foundation, UWFH launched its Digital Navigator program in May 2025. Since then, Digital Navigator Rich Vaden has worked one-on-one and in small groups with more than 900 residents, helping them use technology to stay socially connected, independent, and engaged in daily life, whether through a video call with family, a telehealth visit, or simply feeling more confident navigating an increasingly digital world. The program has also partnered with more than 20 organizations across Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region to bring support into places older adults already know and trust.

This new investment will allow UWFH to take the next step, moving beyond individual assistance to build lasting digital equity capacity across Franklin County. UWFH will train partner organizations to provide digital support, establish a community-informed steering committee that includes older adults with lived experience, expand patient portal and telehealth training with healthcare partners, and advocate for state policies supporting affordable broadband and a credentialing pathway for Digital Navigators.

"This isn't a program that helps people once and moves on. It's steady, relationship-based support that keeps people connected to their health, their benefits, and each other. This grant lets us keep that support in place for the long term, and grow it to reach more of our neighbors."

— Geoff Naunheim, President & CEO, United Way of the Franklin & Hampshire Region

The Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds invest in initiatives in three core areas of focus, including:

- Working on long-lasting, community-driven **policy, systems, and environmental changes** that will make it easier to lead healthy lives and which will reduce health inequities such as racial patterns of segregation in communities and a lack of affordable housing production;
- Organizing and coordinating **Community Health Improvement Planning** efforts which convene multi-sector partnerships to collectively set and address community health goals, and;
- Working to address **policies and systems that increase opportunities for healthy aging**.

This funding supports more than a single program or intervention, it helps communities build sustainable solutions that can create lasting improvements in health, well-being, and opportunity. UWFH looks forward to working alongside partners including the Alliance for Digital Equity, LifePath, Greenfield Neighbors, the Community Health Center of Franklin County, and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, along with residents and stakeholders, to advance meaningful change for older adults in Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region.

The Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds were created in January 2017 when DPH completed a landmark revision of its Determination of Need (DoN) regulation, which authorized the creation of these Funds. DPH provides overall guidance to the Funds and Health Resources in Action, Inc. acts as a fiduciary and implementing partner. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) partners with DPH to support the Healthy Aging Fund.

More information about the Funds can be found at mahealthfunds.org.

About United Way of the Franklin & Hampshire Region

UWFH's mission is to work in partnership with the local community to identify and address the region's most pressing issues. They inspire and engage individuals and organizations to invest together in overcoming those challenges. Their vision is that all individuals and families should have equitable access to the tools and resources designed to support their basic needs and ensure future successes. In doing so, UWFH helps build a strong, vibrant, and inclusive community.

To donate, volunteer, or learn more about the organization, you can contact United Way of the Franklin & Hampshire Region at (413) 584-3962 or visit www.uw-fh.org.

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