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Your Update from AgeOptions

December 2018

## A Message from Diane Slezak

*AgeOptions President and CEO*



*Diane Slezak*

On November 1, I became AgeOptions' president and chief executive officer. I am honored and humbled that the AgeOptions Board of Directors entrusted me to lead the organization I have been a part of for 42 years. I confess that stepping into this role feels a little strange, but at the same time very comfortable.

Over the past months as I prepared to make this transition I have been focusing on the future a great deal, but also reflecting on the past. During AgeOptions' nearly 44-year history we have experienced great success and also weathered many storms (especially the recent years as we operated without an Illinois budget). We are making a profound impact in the communities we serve, and will continue to do so today and into the future.

Our brand has never been stronger or more relevant. AgeOptions' legacy of innovative and effective programs and services makes a difference in the lives of older adults and those who care for them. We have a strong foundation in Older Americans Act programs, which has paved the way to the development of an array of signature programs. Several of our initiatives are now statewide.

The key to the success of all of our programs is our partners. Our relationships are sacred to me and I am dedicated to continuing to invest in and develop them. The strength and value of our identity, and the primary reason for our current and future success, is the AgeOptions team

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driving *all* the work we do. Every day I see amazing examples of the great work our staff does. I can't be more proud to work with them.

Our recent successes are so exciting. We kicked off a new project with health care partners, funded by a grant from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, to ensure older patients have access to much-needed nutrition resources; we are increasing the availability of Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs; we welcomed several new energetic members to the Board of Directors; received another record breaking continuation grant from the Retirement Research Foundation for our work on Make Medicare Work; and we have signed a lease to expand our space to better accommodate our growing staff.

October 2019 also marks the beginning of a new three-year Area Plan on Aging. We will focus on *Social Isolation*, which is a statewide issue, and *Food Insecurity*, which is our local issue. These issues are critical to older adults, and recent national interest and research in these areas will fuel our work to better connect with all of our partners, especially our health care partners, to make great strides in addressing these issues.

Our most visible recent success was the 14th annual fundraising event, Celebrating Leadership, on October 18. More than 350 guests took part in this special evening honoring Jonathan Lavin on his retirement after 40 years leading AgeOptions. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, guests and donors, Celebrating Leadership raised more than \$100,000 in support of AgeOptions programs and services for older adults.

I look forward to working with all of you as we strive to innovate, partner and advocate to improve the systems and services that provide options for people to thrive as they age.