New State Grant Program Key Part of NJ's Age-Friendly Blueprint

New Jersey's decade-old age-friendly movement is gaining new momentum as the state commits $5.5 million to a new grant program aimed at encouraging more Garden State communities to join in the effort.

The new grant program was announced in concert with the official release of the NJ Age-Friendly Blueprint, a 38-page report that suggests avenues for making New Jersey's communities better places for older residents to age-in-place.



"The growth in our older adult population is an opportunity to make our communities more inclusive and more integrated," said Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman, at an announcement event held at the Brookdale Senior Residence in Teaneck.

Teaneck was chosen as the site for the announcement because it has an 8-year-old age-friendly community initiative that Adelman recognized as a "model" for its work across sectors to address transportation, housing and other community livability factors.

Dozens of state, county and local officials attended the event held on May 30th - the second to last day of Older Americans Month.





In all, the Blueprint makes 59 recommendations in the areas of housing, health, transportation, socialization, employment and communication and outreach.

Recommendations range from specific calls to action - such as passage of legislation permitting accessory dwelling units in all New Jersey communities – to loftier aspirations,, such as increasing transit options and improving walkability.

Click here for the full list of recommendations.

“The Blueprint coupled with the grant program will enable communities to make strategic changes that will have a lasting impact, and make it easier for residents to remain independent, stay in their homes and participate in the community as they grow older,” Adelman said.

The blueprint and grant program are the culmination of a two-year-long effort of the State that began in March 2022, when the Murphy Administration empaneled 13 public members and representatives from 10 state agencies to serve on the Age-Friendly State Advisory Council.

“A priority for many of us in the Age-Friendly North Jersey alliance has been to have the state take the reins of this movement and commit some of its substantial resources to helping communities across the state confront the challenges and opportunities of our aging population,” said Janet Sharma, coordinator of Age-Friendly Englewood, one of the appointed members of the Advisory Council.

New Jersey now has 23 towns and three counties that are members of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Many, such as Teaneck and Englewood, were first launched with the benefit of grants from The Henry & Marilyn Taub Foundation and Grotta Fund for Older Adults.

“It’s heartening to see that government dollars will soon be added to the millions of dollars that private foundations and other non-profits have devoted to the cause of helping communities in New Jersey launch surveys, hire age-friendly coordinators, build coalitions and implement change,” Sharma said.

The alliance and its many statewide partners have advocated for the state to harness the age-friendly efforts happening at the local level and develop not just a blueprint but also a far-more detailed multi-sector plan for aging. Such a plan would need to involve high-level state leadership and all departments of government, as well as the private sector.

“The release of the blueprint is an important step forward for the State’s leadership on improving social contexts for aging,” said Dr. Emily Greenfield, Professor and Director of the Rutgers School of Social Work Hub for Aging Collaboration, and another member of the state advisory council. “We know how much state policy and resource allocations matter for aging equity, and the blueprint should serve as an ideal segue to developing a Multisector Plan on Aging for New Jersey–a longer-term, more cross-departmental effort to collaboratively create a better future for aging.”

To ensure impact, state and local governments - with support from the private-sector - must commit resources toward the comprehensive changes promoted in the blueprint, said Julia Stoumbos, director of aging-in-place programs for the Taub Foundation.

“This blueprint summarizes best practices for aging in place and does a good job of laying out priorities and setting goals,” Stoumbos said. “We appreciate the framing of the aging population not as a problem to solve, but instead as an opportunity to help our communities adapt to the present-day and future needs of all of their residents. But like all blueprints, this is just the initial outline of the bigger picture that must be filled in and then made into reality.”

In addition to a multisector plan, New Jersey needs more communities to become active in the age-friendly movement, while also sustaining and building on the efforts of communities that have been working on age-friendly improvements for years. The new grant program, the details of which will be announced in the coming months, will hopefully be a strong incentive for new cities and towns to join in.

Leaders in Age-Friendly North Jersey have pledged to offer their support and partnership.

“Partnerships have driven age-friendly progress in Teaneck, and the same can happen in towns across New Jersey, “ said Elizabeth Davis, executive director of Age-Friendly Teaneck. “We are pleased to hear of the state’s investment in this shared goal and we stand ready to offer our mentorship and support. We stand ready to be your partners.”

Click here for a copy of the state’s press release announcing the blueprint.
Click here for a PIX11 news story/video coverage of the event in Teaneck