

Pennsylvania Senate Aging & Youth and
House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee Hearing
“Aging-Related Issues”

Thursday, August 28, 2014
University of Pittsburgh
University Club, 123 University Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Testimony Submitted by:

Robert Nelkin
President and Chief Professional Officer
United Way of Allegheny County

Thank you for your leadership:

Thank you Senator Vulakovich and Members of the Senate ‘Aging and Youth’ and House ‘Aging and Older Adult Services’ Committees for convening today’s hearing. The issues older adults and their family caregivers face are of critical importance here in Allegheny County and across Pennsylvania.

United Way focuses on critical human needs:

As you may know, United Way of Allegheny County strives for ‘Community Impact.’ Using this strategy our volunteers, community leaders, and staff identify the community’s most urgent needs, develop desired outcomes for the changes we seek, and uses a transparent, volunteer-led process for selecting agencies that have the best approaches to making those changes and the strongest capacity to implement them. We are the philanthropic arm of the business community.

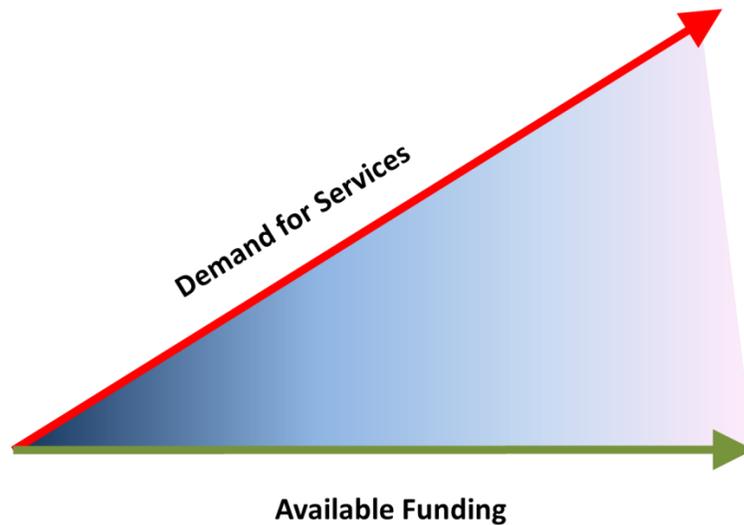
United Way of Allegheny County has evolved over the years to carry out its mission more robustly, but its fundamental purpose remains the same: to improve the lives of our community’s most vulnerable citizens, to provide access to essential services, and to advocate for necessary change.

As part of its annual fundraising, United Way’s fall workplace campaigns engage more than 700 Pittsburgh-area businesses representing more than 60,000 donors. In the 2013 campaign, United Way of Allegheny County raised almost \$34 million—our strongest fundraising campaign ever. These funds are reinvested in the community to tackle critical human services issues for seniors, people with disabilities, children and youth, and financially struggling families.

United Way views the lack of community services for frail seniors as an ‘epic problem’ that must be addressed:

In 2013, United Way studied the needs of elders in Allegheny County through a committee of dedicated community leaders and volunteers, some of whom are in this room today.

We discovered that over the next 20 years, Allegheny County is facing a problem of ‘epic proportion’ in helping the vulnerable seniors in our community live healthy and fulfilling lives. The needs assessment identified dramatically increasing gaps in services for seniors where demand is exponentially larger than the resources available.



As government and charitable funds remain flat, the needs of this population will dramatically rise as the number of years they live with progressive health and lifestyle challenges increases. This is a societal issue that demands immediate action by government systems and the community at large. While among the provider community, these challenges are well-known, the broader community is unaware of the urgency of these issues, despite the growing ranks of people over age 80 and family caregivers in our neighborhoods, workplaces and social networks.

This ‘epic problem’ will best be solved if the state puts its muscle behind mobilizing the caring power of family members, neighbors and various community groups:

To fill this growing gap between demand and funding, there are a variety of actions that can be taken to help frail seniors and their caregivers. The solutions come naturally from family members, neighbors, faith groups, senior services and local government. The state can be a major backer and facilitator of these community mobilizations. Don’t just think costly nursing homes, other residential care and professional services, but also think how we can spur volunteerism, neighborliness, respite and other aid for caregivers.

United Way has some effective models that might be expanded to help the frail senior live healthy and safe in their own home:

United Way wants to leverage its strengths with convening, engaging and mobilizing the community and decision-makers to create positive change. Presently, there is no systematic approach to filling this gap and no level of awareness among the public of the urgency of these issues.

I will list the approaches we have identified to fill the gap and some of United Way's work that aligns with these approaches.

1) Engage More Volunteers to Support Seniors

- *Open Your Heart to a Senior* is a volunteer recruitment initiative of United Way of Allegheny County including 17 partner agencies in Allegheny & Westmoreland counties. The initiative had a steady increase of volunteers recruited between 2008 (program inception) and 2013. In 2013, 1,463 seniors were supported to live in their homes by 620 volunteers.

2) Enhance Caregiver Support

- *Caregiver Resource Initiative* is a developing program at United Way in partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services/Area Agency on Aging which aims to transform the experience of aging and caregiving in Allegheny County, by starting with raising the visibility of caregiving as a critical societal issue. This fall, volunteers from the business and civic communities will lead a charge to analyze existing human services, service gaps, and national best practices to support family caregivers and develop possible solutions – both through public policy and programmatic changes. This team will also lead the launch caregiver outreach in the workplace utilizing the United Way donor network to ensure these solutions are practical for both employers and employees. This new *Initiative* will be endorsed by business and civic leaders, giving the issues credibility and visibility, which are powerful tools for change.

3) Empower Seniors with the Tools for Improved Self-Care

- *Better Choices, Better Health* is the local name of the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program from Stanford University. The local United Way-supported program has had over 240 participants from 68 zip codes across Allegheny County. These program participants have on average 3 chronic conditions. Through the University of Pittsburgh, the local program has statistically improved:
 - Confidence & positive attitudes toward health
 - Healthy behaviors
 - Perceived health & quality of life

United Way with its agency partners aims to bring this model to scale and sustainability thanks to the generous support of local funders (Highmark and Allegheny County Medical Society).

4) Stop the state bureaucrats and bean counters from cutting programs that work for both the vulnerable seniors and taxpayers:

- The Campaign for What Works is United Way's good government advocacy initiative in partnership with The Pittsburgh Foundation and the Greater Pittsburgh Non-Profit Partnership and the Forbes Fund to ensure the future of vital human service programs and, above all, the well-being of the people they serve. The campaign has been the driving force behind renaming the PA Department of Public Welfare to the 'Department of Human Services' and, with the extraordinary lift by Senator Vulakovich, restoring some of the cuts to the Aging Waiver, which was a true threat to the well-being of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable older adults.

5) Increasing collaboration and stimulating innovation

- United Way knows that no one agency or service provider can support seniors and their families alone. It requires collaboration to stretch scarce resources and avoid duplication while providing the support that older Pennsylvanians need. United Way is funding an innovative collaboration of six Allegheny County Meals on Wheels providers to implement a project using smart phone technology to catch changes in condition in a senior during a meal delivery. Observed concerns are communicated via a smart phone application with real time follow-up by a trained professional. Over 3,200 seniors will be

monitored several times per week and data will be collected on the impact that this unique preventive measure has on the older adult's well-being and hospital admissions.

In summary, it is imperative that we, as those working together to improve the lives of older adults and their caregivers in the Commonwealth, engage the community to help them understand the great urgency of the need and be an integral part of the solutions.

With your help, we can bridge the gap with proven solutions.

