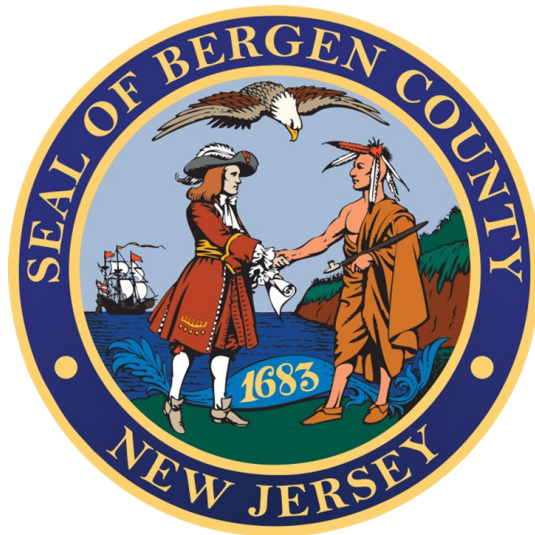


BERGEN *County* **NEW JERSEY**

Department of Human Services Division of Senior Services



Strategic Plan on Aging 2025 - 2027



Bergen County
Department of Human Services
Division of Senior Services
Strategic Plan on Aging 2025-2027

Introduction

The Bergen County Division of Senior Services recognizes the growing aging population in our community and the need for a comprehensive plan to address their unique needs and challenges. As a result, we have developed a Strategic Plan on Aging that outlines our vision and goals for supporting and enhancing the quality of life for older adults and caregivers in Bergen County. Our plan is grounded in the belief that all seniors should have access to the resources and services necessary to maintain their health, independence, and dignity as they age.

The Strategic Plan on Aging is designed to provide a roadmap for the future of aging services in Bergen County. It will guide our efforts to enhance existing programs and services, develop new initiatives, and strengthen partnerships to ensure that older adults have the support they need to age well. It is the result of a collaborative effort between the County, community partners, and stakeholders who are committed to improving the lives of seniors in our community.

DSS' (Division of Senior Services) Strategic Plan on Aging 2025-2027 was developed based on the Division's needs assessment and service providers' survey results, published research and data, internal data analysis, public hearings, and information gathered from community partners through collaborative communications.

Division of Senior Services Mission Statement

It is the mission of Bergen County Division of Senior Services to promote the well-being of Bergen County's senior population, identify and target especially those vulnerable and in greatest social and economic need, and reach out and help seniors and caregivers to access available services designed to meet their needs.

Executive Summary

Bergen County Division of Senior Services was established in 1966 under Federal Legislation of the Older Americans Act. It is the primary planning, coordinating, and funding agency for senior programs and services, promoting the well-being, health, and independence of Bergen County's 227,158 older adults. The Division targets especially those vulnerable and in greatest social and economic need and prepares for the rapid growth of the senior population and the continued increase in longevity and diversity.

As the lead agency for the Bergen County's Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC), the Division helps older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers access the complex, long-term care, community-based, health and human services.

DSS' Nutrition and Wellness Unit delivers health promotions and wellness programs throughout Bergen County. Administrative support for Meals on Wheels and congregate nutrition services, as well as nutrition education and counseling are provided. Involving seniors in health promotion and disease prevention initiatives are an important focus for DSS since studies indicate that a healthy lifestyle generates wellness and will delay or prevent the onset of chronic conditions, injuries, and other illnesses. Thus, practicing healthy aging will not only promote an improved quality of life but is expected to reduce health care costs as well.

DSS' I&A (Information and Assistance) Unit serves as the County's central source of information and services for older adults, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities. Under the guidelines of ADRC (Bergen Aging and Disability Resource Connection), the program helps older adults and their caregivers to access necessary services.

I&A program is a mandated service under the Older American's Act. A focus is directed to target low-income, vulnerable and minority consumers, and outreach efforts are aimed at extending into communities where services are most urgent, such as those with language barriers, cultural restraints, and little means to avail themselves to programming.

The I&A Unit serves as the lead agency for MLTSS (Managed Long-Term Care Services and Supports) with the ability to screen potential Medicaid recipients and initiate the required clinical authorization process. Care managers can guide care recipients and their families to understand the complex long-term care community-based system and also assist eligible individuals to obtain the needed services to help people remain in their homes as long, and as comfortably as possible.

Information and Assistance specialists provide up-to-date and accurate information about:

- Adult Day Care
- Assistive Technology
- Health and Wellness
- Home Modification/Maintenance
- Leisure/Education/Volunteering
- Financial Assistance
- Pharmaceutical Assistance
- Social Security/SSI/Medicaid
- Bilingual Assistance
- Utilities Assistance
- Benefits Eligibility
- Adult Protective Services
- Consumer Protection
- Home Care Programs
- Disability Services
- Institutional Care
- Legal Services
- Ombudsman/Quality of Care
- Medicare Saving Programs
- Respite Care
- Senior Activity Centers
- Tax Relief
- Transportation
- Caregivers Assistance
- Housing
- Reverse Mortgage

The Senior Centers Unit administers 10 Senior Centers throughout Bergen County with a nutritional component at each center. In an effort to reduce isolation, increase socialization and recreation, physical activity, evidence-based health promotion activities, exercise, cultural and holiday events, and education, the centers provide a variety of services and activities five days a week. The Bergen County Division of Community Transportation provides transportation to and from all the centers.

2025-2027 Area Plan Contract Service Providers



Developing partnerships with community organizations and the network of service provider organizations is critical to enhance public awareness and facilitate access to various community resources and services. Through creative thinking, the dedication of our providers, partnerships with non-profit and for-profit agencies, and the support of New Jersey's Division of Aging Services, DSS strives to offer services that provide independence, dignity, and choice; to promote healthy lifestyles; to inform and educate seniors and caregivers about new developments and available resources in the community.

DSS receives Older Americans Act funding through Federal and State agencies to provide community-based programs for seniors and caregivers. Allocated funding is awarded through an open and competitive RFP (Request for Proposals) process every three years. The following contracted service provider organizations are receiving the APC (Area Plan Contract) funding for the years 2025-2027:

- 55 Kip Center
- Act Now Foundation
- Asian Women's Christian Association
- Bergen County Division of Community Transportation
- Bergen County Board of Social Services
- Bergen County Division of Disability Services
- Bergen County Division of Senior Services
- Bergen County LGBTQ+ Alliance
- Bergen Family Center
- Bergen Volunteers
- CareLink360
- Catholic Charities
- CBH Care
- Center for Food Action
- Christian Health
- Cliffside Park Housing Authority
- Friends of Grace Seniors
- Geriatric Services, Inc.
- Greater Bergen Community Action, Inc.
- Heightened Independence and Progress
- Housing Authority of Bergen County
- Jewish Family & Children's Services of Northern NJ
- Jewish Federation of Northern NJ
- Kaplan JCC on the Palisades
- Korean American Senior Citizens' Association of NJ
- Meals on Wheels North Jersey
- Northeast New Jersey Legal Services
- Rebuilding Together North Jersey
- Richard & Catherine Nest Adult Activity Center, Fort Lee
- Vantage Health System
- Women's Rights Information Center
- YWCA Northern NJ

DSS Strategic Plan on Aging 2025-2027 Goals, Objectives, Methods, and Evaluation

Strategic Plan on Aging is a comprehensive plan to address the needs of our aging population and their caregivers. With the number of older adults projected to grow significantly, it is crucial to ensure that our communities and systems are prepared to meet their needs.

DSS' Strategic Plan on Aging 2025-2027 was developed based on the findings from Division's needs assessment [2024 Needs Assessment](#) and service providers surveys, published research and data, internal data analysis, public hearings, focus groups, and information gathered from community partners through collaborative communications.

The following strategic plan outlines key goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve these aims:

1. Health and Wellness
2. Caregiver Support
3. Emergency Preparedness and Response

Goal 1: Health and Wellness

The aging population in Bergen County, New Jersey, is rapidly increasing, with individuals aged 60 and older constituting a growing segment of the community. This demographic trend underscores the urgent need to address the unique health and wellness challenges faced by older adults. As life expectancy continues to rise, many individuals seek to maintain their independence and actively participate in their communities. However, they are often confronted with barriers such as chronic health conditions, social isolation, limited access to healthcare, and disparities shaped by social determinants of health. Tackling these challenges is essential to ensure that older residents thrive and enjoy a high quality of life. This approach is informed by the findings of a recent needs assessment conducted by the Division of Senior Services as well, in which the majority of respondents identified their primary concerns as declining physical and mental health, fear of falling, inability to afford healthcare costs, memory loss, and social isolation. These concerns will serve as benchmarks for evaluating program success and aligning future initiatives with community needs.

Preventive and evidence-based health promotion programs are critically needed to mitigate the impact of chronic diseases prevalent among the aging population. Conditions related to health and wellness significantly affect older adults' physical and mental well-being. These conditions often lead to reduced mobility, loss of independence, and higher healthcare costs. While evidence-based programs have been shown to improve health outcomes and empower individuals to manage their health effectively, many seniors in Bergen County lack access to these resources due to financial constraints, transportation challenges, or lack of awareness.

Addressing the broader social determinants of health is equally important to promote wellness among older adults. Factors such as proper nutrition, stable housing, reliable transportation, and opportunities for social inclusion profoundly influence health outcomes. Many seniors in Bergen County lack access to nutritious food, live in homes that require modifications to accommodate their changing needs, or face challenges accessing public transportation. Furthermore, social isolation remains a pressing issue, with significant negative impacts on both physical and mental health, including increased risks of depression, cognitive decline, and even mortality.

Hosting a health fair is an effective strategy to address these needs, as it can provide older residents with direct access to healthcare providers, community organizations, and educational resources. Such events create opportunities for seniors to learn about preventive measures, connect with services that address their specific needs, and engage with peers, fostering a sense of community. This type of engagement can reduce feelings of isolation while empowering seniors to take proactive steps toward improving their overall health.

Given the diverse and growing aging population, Bergen County requires a multifaceted approach to meet these challenges. Collaborative efforts between healthcare providers, local agencies, and community organizations can enhance service delivery and ensure that programs are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the county's diverse population. Emphasizing health promotion and social inclusion will not only support older residents in achieving healthier aging but also reduce long-term healthcare costs and strengthen the overall well-being of the community.

As the aging population continues to increase, Bergen County's Division of Senior Services is uniquely positioned to take the lead in implementing innovative and targeted initiatives. By focusing on preventive health, addressing social determinants of health, and fostering community connections, the Division can ensure that the county remains a welcoming and supportive environment for its aging residents.

Goal 1: Health and Wellness Objective(s)

Objective 1.1: Expand preventive and evidence-based health promotion programs

Methods:

- Partner with local healthcare providers, community organizations, and senior centers to develop and deliver evidence-based programs (e.g., fall prevention, chronic disease management, and mental health workshops).
- Conduct outreach to seniors through social media, newsletters, and community events to raise awareness about these programs.
- Offer both in-person and virtual program options to increase accessibility.
- Estimated Completion Date: Ongoing, with new programs introduced throughout the year.

Objective 1.2: Host Health Fair

Methods:

- Organize an annual health fair featuring local healthcare providers, nutritionists, fitness instructors, and community organizations.
- Provide free screenings (e.g., blood pressure, glucose testing), wellness demonstrations, and informational booths.
- Promote the event through local newspapers, senior newsletters, social media, and community boards.
- Estimated Completion Date: Spring 2025 and annually thereafter.

Objective 1.3: Address social determinants of health (nutrition, housing/home modification, transportation, social inclusion, health care, education).

Methods:

- Collaborate with housing authorities, transportation agencies, and food pantries to improve access to necessary services.
- Develop a referral system for seniors to connect with community resources for housing modifications, transportation assistance, and social inclusion programs.
- Host quarterly forums to gather input from older adults about their specific needs and prioritize services accordingly.
- Estimated Completion Date: Ongoing, with new programs introduced throughout the year.

Goal 2: Caregiver Support

Caregivers play a critical role in supporting the health and well-being of older adults. As the aging population continues to grow, the number of family members, friends, and community members providing care for their loved ones also increases. These caregivers often juggle significant responsibilities, including managing medical appointments, assisting with daily living tasks, and navigating complex systems of care, all while balancing their personal and professional lives. Despite their invaluable contributions, caregivers often lack the resources, education, and support necessary to manage the challenges they face effectively. Addressing their needs is vital to improving the quality of life for both caregivers and the individuals they support. In needs assessment, caregivers identified their key needs as connecting with agencies to access services, financial support, emotional and mental well-being, respite care, support groups, and home care assistance.

Caregiving is inherently demanding, with many caregivers experiencing high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional strain. The physical and mental health of caregivers often suffer due to their responsibilities, creating a ripple effect that can ultimately affect the quality of care provided to older adults. Furthermore, many caregivers in Bergen County are unprepared to handle specific challenges such as dementia care, legal and financial planning, and accessing benefits and services. This gap in knowledge and resources underscores the need for targeted educational opportunities to equip caregivers with the tools they need to thrive in their roles.

In-person and virtual workshops are an effective way to address these needs by providing accessible education and resources tailored to caregivers' unique challenges. Topics such as dementia care, stress management, navigating legal and financial systems, and understanding available programs and benefits are critical to empowering caregivers. These workshops not only enhance caregivers' skills and confidence but also foster a sense of community, helping them realize they are not alone on their journey. Virtual workshops, in particular, offer a convenient solution for caregivers with limited time or mobility, ensuring broader accessibility to valuable information.

Moreover, caregivers often face difficulty in identifying and accessing the resources and programs available to them. Many are unaware of local and state benefits designed to ease their burdens, such as respite care, financial assistance, or counseling services. By providing education on these programs and benefits, Bergen County's Division of Senior Services can ensure that caregivers are better informed and equipped to utilize these critical resources.

Caregiver support is not just about education; it also requires a holistic approach that addresses their emotional well-being and builds resilience. Workshops and community programs that include stress management techniques and self-care strategies are essential for sustaining caregivers in their roles. When caregivers are supported, the older adults they care for are more likely to receive consistent and compassionate care, enhancing their overall quality of life.

The Division of Senior Services is uniquely positioned to provide leadership in this area, ensuring that caregivers have the resources, education, and support they need to succeed. By hosting regular workshops and connecting caregivers with vital programs and benefits, the Division can alleviate the pressures of caregiving and strengthen the overall network of care for the county's aging population.

Goal 2: Caregiver Support Objective(s)

Objective 2.1: Provide education and resources (host regular in-person and virtual workshops on topics such as dementia care, stress management, available programs and benefits, and navigating legal and financial issues).

Methods:

- Develop a series of in-person and virtual workshops focusing on topics such as dementia care, stress management, navigating legal and financial systems, and accessing community programs and benefits.
- Create caregiver resource guides, available both in print and online, summarizing key information and contact details for local services.
- Establish a caregiver support network by collaborating with local support groups and mental health professionals.
- Conduct surveys to assess caregiver needs and tailor workshops to address their concerns.
- Estimated Completion Date: Ongoing, with new programs introduced throughout the year.

Goal 3: Emergency Preparedness and Response

Older adults in Bergen County are among the most vulnerable populations when disasters or emergencies strike. Whether facing natural disasters like hurricanes and blizzards, public health crises, or power outages, older adults often encounter significant challenges in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. These challenges can stem from physical or cognitive limitations, reliance on caregivers, social isolation, or lack of access to critical resources and information. As Bergen County's aging population continues to increase, addressing the unique emergency preparedness needs of older adults is an urgent priority to safeguard their health and safety. Additionally, 85% of needs assessment respondents indicated they are not prepared for an emergency or disaster, presenting the critical need for targeted emergency preparedness initiative.

The risks associated with emergencies are amplified for older adults who may have limited mobility, chronic health conditions, or medical equipment requiring electricity. Additionally, many older residents rely on medications, making disruptions to pharmacy access or transportation a critical concern. During emergencies, social isolation can leave older adults without the support networks needed to evacuate, secure essential supplies, or access emergency services. Furthermore, language barriers and limited digital literacy can prevent seniors from understanding or receiving timely emergency notifications.

Educating older adults about emergency preparedness is essential to mitigating these risks. By providing accessible workshops and distributing educational materials, Bergen County can empower its senior residents to take proactive steps to protect themselves. Topics such as creating an emergency plan, assembling a disaster preparedness kit, and understanding local evacuation routes can significantly improve outcomes during emergencies. Practical workshops, tailored to address the specific needs of older adults, provide an opportunity for hands-on learning and direct engagement with experts.

Distributing emergency preparedness kits is another critical component of this initiative. Many older adults, particularly those with fixed or limited incomes, may not have the resources to purchase the items necessary for a comprehensive emergency kit. By ensuring that seniors have access to these essential supplies, Bergen County can help close this gap and enhance their readiness for unexpected events.

In addition to individual preparedness, reviewing and updating emergency preparedness and response plans at the community level is vital to addressing the systemic challenges faced by older adults during crises. Collaboration between the Division of Senior Services, local government agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations ensures a coordinated response that prioritizes the needs of older residents. It also helps identify gaps in current systems, such as transportation for evacuation or communication with isolated individuals, enabling the development of targeted solutions.

Older adults represent a diverse population with varying needs and capabilities, requiring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to emergency preparedness. Tailored outreach, culturally competent materials, and multilingual resources are critical to ensuring that all seniors, regardless of background or circumstances, are equipped to respond effectively in an emergency.

By prioritizing emergency preparedness and response, the Bergen County Division of Senior Services can significantly enhance the safety and resilience of its aging population. Proactive measures, such as education, distribution of kits, and improved planning, not only protect older residents during emergencies but also foster a sense of security and empowerment. As emergencies become increasingly frequent and severe, this initiative is essential to ensuring that Bergen County remains a safe and supportive environment for its senior population.

Goal 3: Emergency Preparedness and Response Objective(s):

Objective 3.1: Educate Older Adults on Emergency Preparedness (distribute emergency preparedness kits and educational materials, host workshops on disaster readiness, review and update emergency preparedness and response plans).

Methods:

- Partner with local emergency management agencies to develop and distribute emergency preparedness kits tailored to older adults' needs.
- Organize workshops covering disaster readiness, emergency planning, and evacuation procedures.
- Develop multilingual educational materials and distribute them through senior centers, libraries, and community organizations.
- Conduct an annual review of emergency preparedness and response plans to identify and address gaps.
- Estimated Completion Date: Ongoing, with new programs introduced throughout the year.

Evaluation

The Bergen County Division of Senior Services will employ a comprehensive self-evaluation process to monitor progress and measure the effectiveness of the initiatives associated with the Health and Wellness, Caregiver Support, and Emergency Preparedness and Response goals. The evaluation process will be data-driven and will incorporate both qualitative and quantitative metrics to ensure an accurate assessment of outcomes. The following strategies will guide the evaluation:

1. Data Collection and Analysis

Participation Metrics: Track attendance and participation rates for all workshops, programs, health fairs, and emergency preparedness events. Maintain detailed records, including demographic data, to identify trends and ensure outreach efforts are inclusive and representative of the diverse senior population in Bergen County.

Feedback Surveys: Distribute pre- and post-program surveys to participants to assess their knowledge, confidence, and satisfaction with the services provided. Use this data to measure the immediate impact of educational initiatives and identify areas for improvement.

Service Utilization: Monitor the usage of distributed resources, such as emergency preparedness kits, caregiver guides, and referrals to community programs. Collaborate with partner organizations to track the effectiveness of these resources in addressing participants' needs.

2. Outcome Measurement

Health and Wellness Programs: Measure improvements in health outcomes by tracking participant-reported progress, such as reduced falls, better chronic disease management, and increased physical activity levels. Conduct follow-up surveys at three- and six-month intervals post-program completion.

Caregiver Support: Evaluate caregiver well-being through stress-level assessments and self-reported confidence in caregiving skills. Monitor engagement with caregiver networks and support groups to assess their impact on reducing isolation and burnout.

Emergency Preparedness: Assess changes in participants' readiness levels by conducting surveys before and after workshops, measuring knowledge of emergency procedures, and tracking the distribution and use of preparedness kits.

3. Stakeholder Feedback

Conduct regular meetings with key stakeholders, including community organizations, healthcare providers, and emergency management agencies, to gather input on program effectiveness and areas for enhancement. Stakeholder feedback will provide valuable insights into operational efficiency and the broader impact of initiatives.

4. Continuous Improvement

Quarterly Reviews: Establish a quarterly review process to evaluate progress against the project timeline and objectives. Use these reviews to identify challenges, celebrate successes, and implement necessary adjustments.

Annual Evaluation Report: Compile an annual report summarizing participation rates, key outcomes, stakeholder feedback, and lessons learned. Share this report with internal teams, funding partners, and community stakeholders to promote transparency and accountability.

5. Long-Term Impact Assessment

Conduct longitudinal studies to track the sustained impact of programs, such as improved health outcomes, enhanced caregiver resilience, and increased emergency readiness among participants. Use this data to refine and scale initiatives as needed.



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