

# BAY AGING PARTNERSHIPS BRING HELP AND HOPE TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



Housing and Services  
Resource Center

**M**r. Spriggs, a 68-year-old veteran, contacted Bay Aging when he could no longer afford to pay \$400 for the shed where he lived. Ten days later, he moved into a service-enriched apartment developed and managed by Bay Aging, an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) in Urbanna, Virginia. The move gave Mr. Spriggs access to supports that would allow him to bathe, cook and eat nutritious meals. He now is thriving both mentally and physically. He can be seen walking around town getting his steps in, smiling, waving, and making new friends.

His change in living situation was made possible by a contractual relationship between Bay Aging and the local U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office. Through this relationship, Bay Aging provides subsidized housing with ready access to transportation, community living services, and health programs that help older adults and others live independently in their communities. Other partnerships between Bay Aging and local community organizations are helping to improve the availability of affordable and accessible housing, promote housing stability, and reduce homelessness.

Starting with a general overview of homelessness and the need for partnerships in housing and services, this case study describes Bay Aging's housing partnerships and programs that helped the AAA address homelessness and promote housing stability. Bay Aging has also had an impact in the greater community as a founding member and leader of the Northern Neck Middle Peninsula Housing Coalition. This case study features the award-winning results of these collaborations as well as suggestions that organizations can use to form housing and supportive services partnerships of their own.

## HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIPS LINK HOUSING AND SERVICES

In any single night in January 2020, about 580,000 people were experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, homelessness is disproportionately high among those identifying as Black or African American; American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian; or Hispanic/Latino.<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities are also more likely to experience homelessness. Nearly half (48.5 percent) of

single adults and heads of households who used homeless shelters over the course of a year report living with a disability, according to HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2016, homelessness has been increasing, and the COVID-19 pandemic made finding and retaining stable housing more difficult.<sup>4</sup> Also notable is the rise in the number of people age 50 years and older who are experiencing

homelessness.<sup>5</sup> This population is more likely to have chronic medical conditions and to experience severe illness due to COVID-19.<sup>6</sup>

To become housed, many people who are experiencing homelessness need a combination of affordable and accessible housing and a range of services, including nutrition, health care, tenancy support, transportation, benefits enrollment, behavioral health, and assistance with everyday activities.<sup>7</sup> Across the nation, HUD funds Continuums of Care (CoCs)

to serve as networks of governmental and nonprofit organizations that provide housing and support for people experiencing homelessness. Partnerships between CoCs and AAAs help ensure people at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness have access to the mix of supports they need to (re)gain stability. To these partnerships, AAAs bring not only a local network of service providers, but also deep expertise from decades of serving older adults and caregivers (see *What Is an Area Agency on Aging* on the next page).



## WHAT IS AN AREA AGENCY ON AGING (AAA)?

Created by the Older Americans Act in 1973, AAAs are part of the national Aging Network. AAAs are the local leaders that develop, coordinate, and deliver a wide range of home and community-based services. These services include information and referral/assistance, case management, home-delivered meals and meals in congregate settings, in-home services, caregiver supports, transportation, evidence-based health and wellness programs, long-term care ombudsman programs, and more. People who receive services provided by AAAs have improved health and well-being, helping them remain in their homes and thrive in the community.

## BAY AGING LINKS HOUSING AND SERVICES

As both the AAA for a 10-county region and a Community Action Agency<sup>a</sup> for eight counties, Bay Aging has diverse funding streams it can draw upon to serve older adults and other populations. Federal Older Americans Act funding is allocated to AAAs by State Units on Aging, and the U.S. Administration for Children & Families funds Community Action Agencies through Community Services Block Grants. These and other funding sources enable Bay Aging to offer a wide array of services through its specialized divisions for housing, health, and transit. Bay Aging has developed internal systems to integrate these supports seamlessly for its clients (see *Bay Aging Housing-Related Services During the Pandemic* on the next page).

To provide affordable, accessible housing, Bay Aging developed, owns, and manages 10 communities funded through the HUD Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program. The federal program provided the initial capital for the development of units designated for people age 62 and older. All Bay Aging apartments have universal design features, so they can be accessed by anyone, including people with mobility challenges, older adults, and people with disabilities. The AAA also maintains a HUD Project Rental Assistance Contract, which helps support operating expenses in Section 202 properties to allow rents to remain low; residents pay only 30 percent of their adjusted gross income each month.

Living in a Bay Aging apartment enables residents to have the benefit of ready access to an array of services, including on-site care coordination. The AAA's care coordinators work in partnership with residents to help organize and manage clinical and/or supportive services. Care coordinators can be essential to stabilizing a housing situation, averting crises, and improving health and well-being.

In 2020, 367 older adults lived in 317 safe and affordable Bay Aging apartments. Yet unmet needs in this rural region remained significant. In 2021 Bay Aging had more than 1,000 older adults on its waiting list for housing. For this reason, Bay Aging secured Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to construct its eleventh property. In 2022, this 40-unit property, which includes one-and-two bedroom units, will provide up to 136 older adults with a place to live and supportive services that can both help stabilize their housing situation and their health.

<sup>a</sup> Community Action Agencies are designated by state or local governments to work with community partners to reduce poverty among extremely poor populations.

## INNOVATIVE HUD PARTNERSHIP REDUCES HOMELESSNESS

Bay Aging's ongoing relationship with HUD provided the foundation for the AAA to expand efforts to reduce homelessness. Over several years, with HUD's approval, Bay Aging established criteria for prioritizing housing applications from populations with higher needs. These criteria give preference to applicants from two populations:

- **Veterans Preference:**

In 2010, Bay Aging became the first age- and income-restricted housing provider in Virginia to receive HUD approval to offer a veterans preference for housing. As a result, veterans who were eligible for Bay Aging apartments and had an honorable discharge received priority to move up the waitlist. In 2015, Virginia became the first state to functionally end

veteran homelessness, meaning that Virginia can house all veterans experiencing homelessness in an average month.<sup>8</sup>

- **Homeless Preference:**

In 2018, Bay Aging began partnering with its local CoC to provide supportive housing for older adults who were transitioning out of homelessness. Bay Aging became the first in Virginia to implement a homeless preference under the HUD Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program.

After many years of adaptation, Bay Aging eventually created a unique way to rotate through preferences to create a diverse community. The process entails using multiple lists for multiple properties and exhausting the preference waitlist before moving to another list.<sup>b</sup>

### BAY AGING SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC

During the pandemic, Bay Aging offered services across its full service area, including to older adults who have low incomes, chronic health conditions, and/or barriers to remaining stably housed. Because many of these individuals also have elevated risk for COVID-19 complications, Bay Aging coordinated vaccines for people who live in age-restricted rental housing. Bay Transit, a Bay Aging program, offered free rides to all community members on retrofitted buses, with free hand sanitizer and masks available. The AAA also partnered with local restaurants to provide meal delivery services. The provision of these services helped community members stay in their homes.

<sup>b</sup> For example: Unit A becomes available, and it is offered to veteran applicant 1. If they decline, it is offered to veteran applicant 2... and so on. When Unit B becomes available, it is offered to homeless applicant 1. If they decline, are no longer homeless, etc., it is offered to homeless applicant 2. If there are no more verified homeless individuals, the unit will then be offered to a general applicant. When Unit C becomes available, it is offered to general applicant 1. If they decline, it is offered to general applicant 2. When Unit D becomes available, it is offered to veteran applicant 3.

# *[P]artnerships between Bay Aging and local community organizations improve the availability of affordable and accessible housing, promote housing stability, and reduce homelessness.*

## **BAY AGING PROGRAMS TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS**

Bay Aging brings together a variety of programs to address homelessness using federal, state, and philanthropic funding, including federal COVID-19-relief funds.

- **Housing crisis hotline:** Individuals in the region who are experiencing a housing crisis can call to be assessed for, referred to, and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs. The hotline connects to the regional CoC's coordinated entry process that ensures all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access and are quickly connected to services.<sup>9</sup> Bay Aging operates the coordinated entry process.
- **Financial assistance:** Bay Aging administers rapid rehousing and emergency services, which provides a subsidy and security deposit to quickly stabilize a household in a housing crisis.
- **Emergency housing vouchers:** To prevent homelessness, in addition to and separate from the HUD 202 Program, Bay Aging also administers HUD Emergency Housing Vouchers through the department's Housing Choice Voucher Program.
- **Housing navigation:** To help people find housing, Bay Aging coordinates with landlords to identify an inventory of affordable and accessible rental units to match incoming clients to housing that has the supportive services clients need, in the areas where clients prefer to live.
- **Supportive services:** Bay Aging supports residents through case management that assesses needs, plans and monitors services, and evaluates. The agency also provides credit counseling, landlord negotiation and legal advocacy, increased access to benefits,

modifications to rental units for accessibility, tenancy support, and much more. Anyone in the Bay Aging service area can receive options counseling, which provides unbiased information on the available programs, services, and options to help people make informed choices about housing and other services.

- **Technology to track housing data:** The Homeless Management Information System stores data,

referrals, and outcomes, and can communicate with other systems that AAAs and other organizations in the field may already use.

While Bay Aging operates the above programs in its service area, these programs may have different administrators in other communities. Where they exist, these programs may represent potential partners for homelessness services and organizations in the aging and disability networks. Where they do not, they represent potential gaps that community partnerships could fill.

*[C]oalition members and Bay Aging have a shared mission to serve the people who are at high levels of disadvantage.*

### **HOUSING COALITION PARTNERSHIPS SERVE THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS**

Bay Aging works with community partners to reduce homelessness. Bay Aging is a founding member of the Northern Neck Middle Peninsula Housing Coalition and was officially recognized by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development as the local coalition's Lead Agency in 2018.

The coalition serves the same 10-county area as Bay Aging. The coalition has a community services board and includes organizations addressing domestic violence, departments of social services, emergency shelters, the faith community, homelessness prevention, housing providers, legal aid, street outreach, Virginia Housing (state housing finance agency), Virginia Department of Housing and Community

Development, Virginia Department of Veteran Services, and HUD.

Coalition members communicate daily, sharing knowledge and skills and working collectively to break down silos in housing, health care, transportation, and more. They are part of the CoC's coordinated entry process, the referral system that involves the community in helping people find housing. Bay Aging also receives referrals from health care providers and has its own options counseling service.

Bay Aging finds that the coalition aligns well with the services Bay Aging provides as a AAA. Furthermore, coalition members and Bay Aging have a shared mission to serve the people who have a high level of need.

## BAY AGING'S AWARD-WINNING OUTCOMES

Bay Aging's efforts have been recognized by several awards programs, including the 2022 and 2021 USAging Aging Innovations and Achievement Awards program and the Virginia Commonwealth Council on Aging award. In March 2021, the Virginia Trust Fund awarded Bay Aging a \$300,000 Older Adults Innovation Project grant. These awards recognize cutting-edge models that others should consider replicating.

## REPLICATION

Bay Aging's accomplishments are impressive—and replicable. Bay Aging's Senior Vice President of Housing Joshua Gemerek encouraged AAAs and other community-based organizations that wish to model similar efforts to look at needs, funding sources, and opportunities to form partnerships with organizations that address housing needs and homelessness. As AAAs identify housing issues, they often can find easy, quick wins, he said. For example, Gemerek encouraged AAAs to speak with their local HUD offices to identify local Section 202 properties to learn which services their residents need. Or, in areas with a high number of people for whom English is a second language, AAAs also could offer language translation services.

Building business relationships that leverage and benefit from shared expertise and resources are key to better delivering coordinated services

and supports to individuals in the community. Bay Aging urges AAAs and CoCs to create partnerships with other networks that stabilize housing situations for older adults and people with disabilities. Formal partnerships also enable AAAs to receive funding through homeless services programs to carry out specialized support. Developers can implement homeless preference policies similar to Bay Aging's, which could lead to revenue from programs that provide incentives to reduce homelessness, according to Bay Aging.

"Partnerships that bridge Continuums of Care and AAAs are critical for every community to have and should be tailored to each unique community," said Gemerek. "At a minimum, information and referrals should take place in networking spaces, such as AAA's Aging and Disability Resource Center engagements."

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> US Interagency Council on Homelessness. 2021. Key Findings of 2020 Point-in-Time Count. <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/2020-point-in-time-count/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2021. The 2020 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Cho R. 2021. What Will It Take to House America? National Alliance to End Homelessness. <https://endhomelessness.org/what-will-it-take-to-house-america>.

<sup>5</sup> Culhane D, Byrne T, Metraux S, et al. 2019. The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness: Could Housing Solutions Be Funded by Avoidance of Excess Shelter, Hospital, and Nursing Home Costs? <https://www.aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Emerging-Crisis-of-Aged-Homelessness-1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Cha S, Henry A, et al. 2021. Morbidity and Mortality Among Adults Experiencing Homelessness Hospitalized With COVID-19. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 224(3): 425–430. <https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/224/3/425/6276529>.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2021. Advancing Community Living Through Coordination Between Housing and Voluntary Community Services. [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/ada/HHS-HUD\\_HousingFactSheetpdf.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/ada/HHS-HUD_HousingFactSheetpdf.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2018. Ending Veteran Homelessness in Virginia: A Statewide Collaboration. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/ending-veteran-homelessness-virginia-statewide-collaboration>.

<sup>9</sup> HUD Exchange. Coordinated Entry and Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) FAQs. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-and-HMIS-FAQs.pdf>.

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