The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (Elder Affairs) was created in 1971 to address the needs of older adults. Since its creation, Elder Affairs has overseen a network of public services that facilitate healthy aging for older Massachusetts residents across the state. The primary service delivery organizations overseen by Elder Affairs include Massachusetts Area Agencies on Aging, Aging Services Access Points, and Councils on Aging.

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) were created at the national level by the 1965 Older Americans Act to provide support for community-based services to meet the needs of older Americans at the city and county levels. Unique to Massachusetts, localized AAAs receive federal funding and work with state-funded nonprofit Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) to provide services that facilitate healthy aging to older Massachusetts residents. There are 27 ASAPs and 23 AAAs in cities and towns across Massachusetts. The range of services offered by AAAs and ASAPs varies based on local needs, and these agencies may also contract with other, local service providers. All AAAs and ASAPs provide programs that address physical and mental health needs, social engagement, and personal independence.

Councils on Aging (COAs) were created by policymakers in 1956 to be volunteer-run, municipally appointed agencies that help coordinate services for older residents. Typical services provided by COAs include transportation, meal delivery, informational programs, recreation, and related activities that promote healthy aging across the state. There are 348 COAs in Massachusetts. The network of public services that facilitates healthy aging for older Massachusetts residents includes special attention to low-income, minority, immigrant, and rural-dwelling populations. Services are available across the state so that both urban and rural communities have access. Many AAAs, ASAPs, and COAs also provide services in multiple languages or have translators available to help older residents who do not speak English. These public services are available to older residents of Massachusetts regardless of income level.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In 2010, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick announced his administration’s Aging Agenda, which includes nine key focus areas to address in the coming decade. These focus areas
are economic security, physical and mental health, affordable housing, independence, supportive services, transportation, abuse prevention, caregiver support, and public understanding of aging issues. This agenda follows his administration’s “Community First” approach, which encourages healthy aging at home with supportive services from the community. Organizations throughout the state have also aligned with state initiatives by contracting to provide needed services, especially targeting low-income, minority, and immigrant seniors.

Transportation has been a particular concern in Massachusetts, as residents worry about the condition of roads, sidewalks, and public transportation systems, particularly in the greater Boston metropolitan area, where more individuals rely on public transit. For older Massachusetts residents, access to transportation is often critical to healthy aging, as transportation encourages independence and access to basic services, such as the ability to visit a doctor’s office, purchase groceries, or attend a place of worship. Although seniors in the Boston area have access to discounted fares on public transportation, some critics still cite concerns over the costs of transportation for low-income older Massachusetts residents. In addition, not all public transport is accessible for older people who use wheelchairs or other ambulation devices. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority is addressing some of these concerns through its Department of System-Wide Accessibility, which was created in 2007.

**REFERENCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

**ORGANIZATION**

- Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs
- Massachusetts Aging and Disabilities Information Location
- City of Boston Area Agency on Aging
- Individual towns also have Councils on Aging and Agencies on Aging/Aging Services Access Points

**WEBSITE**

- www.mass.gov/elder
- www.madil.org
- www.cityofboston.gov/elderly/agency.asp

**ABOUT SOCIAL IMPACT RESEARCH**

Social Impact Research (SIR) is the independent research department of Root Cause, a research and consulting firm dedicated to mobilizing the nonprofit, public, and business sectors to work collaboratively in a new social impact market. Modeled after private sector equity research firms, SIR conducts research on social issues and independent analysis of program performance to provide leaders and funders with the rigorous, actionable information they need to make strategic decisions about creating and investing in social impact.

**ENDNOTES**


