Creating Healthy Communities for an Aging Population

Executive Summary

Background
This report was prepared by the Creating Healthy Communities for An Aging Population Work Group, which was convened by the Minnesota Department of Health Rural Health Advisory Committee (RHAC) and the State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC).

The work group used a broad-based framework to discuss healthy aging and to identify recommendations with potential to address the issues associated with an aging population, particularly personal and population health needs for aging seniors.

A Working Definition and Framework for Healthy Aging
A review of the current literature led to adoption of a working definition and framework to guide deliberations. A definition of “healthy aging,” developed by the West Virginia Rural Healthy Aging Network, was adapted for use in Minnesota.

Healthy aging is the development and maintenance of optimal mental, social and physical well-being and function in older adults. This is most likely to be achieved when communities are safe, promote health and well-being, and use health services and community programs to prevent or minimize disease.

A framework was identified that includes four components: (1) Addressing Basic Needs (2) Optimizing Health and Well-being (3) Promoting Social/Civic Engagement and (4) Supporting Independence (modified from the AdvantAge Initiative).

Recommendations
The following recommendations are intended to guide future work by RHAC, SCHSAC, and other stakeholders:

1. Develop a community-based self assessment and planning process, with follow-through and maintenance, which will guide the creation of healthy and elder-friendly communities in Minnesota.
2. Improve transportation options for elders by identifying barriers, gaps and assets and by implementing collaborative efforts on the local, regional and state levels.
3. Support the use of technology for care delivery, access to information, opportunities to participate in the community, and targeted services that focus on an aging population.
4. Support infrastructures that provide education and tools for health promotion, self-responsibility for health promotion and maintenance, and disease self-management that are understandable, culturally appropriate and competent.
5. Broaden retirement planning and education to encourage people to take responsibility (early and seriously) to save and use available resources wisely.
6. Address and catalogue mental health needs of the aging population on local, state and national levels.
7. Develop elder-friendly and caregiver education regarding available resources and how to access them using common language and terminology.
8. Enhance and promote a community culture that supports people as they age and recognizes them as an asset.