

***Report on the Response of the Virginia Board for People with  
Disabilities to the Impact of the Aging of Virginia's Population***

December 15, 2014

Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

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Pursuant to Code of Virginia §§ 2.2-5510 and 51.5-136, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.



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## Executive Summary

The Board does not provide direct services to individuals other than those that may be provided through grant or contracts that it funds, focusing on individuals with developmental and/or other disabilities. The Board does have an aging staff with five of 10 authorized full-time equivalent positions being eligible for retirement in the next 7 years.

The Board is attuned to the needs of older Virginians with disabilities and continues to explore this area through policy work, grant work, and other activities. As noted in the report below, the Board has found that a lack of programmatic and physical accessibility is a key challenge experienced by Virginians with disabilities of any age. For example:

- Public buildings may have curb cuts, but offices are not designed to accommodate individuals in a wheelchair or who are blind.
- Medical offices do not have either accessible, adaptive equipment (e.g. exam tables, X-Ray machines) or staff trained to accommodate individuals with mobility issues.
- Publications and websites have varying levels of accessibility

Ongoing challenges relate to the ability of older Virginians and individuals with disabilities to age in place with the appropriate services and supports. The availability of accessible, affordable housing and transportation must be addressed. Continued and greater use and availability of technology in homes and universal design elements will be the key to successfully serving older Virginians, with or without disabilities.

**Transportation** is critical to maintaining employment, receiving health & other services, meeting basic personal needs and participating in social or civic activities. Many Virginians, with and without a disability, rely on dependable public transportation. Ongoing fiscal strain on local finances has made it increasingly difficult for localities to provide stable, adequate annual funding for public transportation; and too often, to invest in sidewalks and curb cuts to create unobstructed pedestrian routes. In addition, the quality and reliability of Medicaid funded transportation has been an issue raised by individuals with disabilities for several years.

The provision of adequate, quality services and supports to prevent institutionalization in nursing homes or other settings must be a priority.

### Steps that should be taken: Federal

- Increase funding both for new low-income housing or rent subsidies and for home modifications, including installation of “smart home” technology and assistive technology, with priority for individuals who are elderly or have a disability.
- Increase funding for public transportation to localities.

**Steps that should be taken: State**

- A long-range commitment to action is indicated to address the growing needs of aging Virginians. Implementation of community services to address needs must be funded at adequate levels and sustained over time.
- Target future planning and commit long-term resources to localities which have the greatest concentration of low income elderly citizens.
- State plans and policies should promote and support community features which enable the elderly to maintain independence and “age in place” in their own homes:
  - ✓ local capital investments to enhance sidewalks, curb cuts, and building accessibility;
  - ✓ subsidies or tax credits for home modifications and “smart home” technology;
  - ✓ incentives to housing developers and current landlords to create a “set aside” proportion of accessible units for elderly who are low income or disabled;
  - ✓ incentives to housing developers to build new housing with universal design features and accessibility;
  - ✓ expand the scope and quality of both public transportation and Medicaid funded transportation;
  - ✓ expand and maintain the VirginiaNavigator sites for resource information;
  - ✓ expand and maintain the Centers for Independent Living, which provide training, information and technical assistance to Virginians with disabilities to promote independent living.
- For localities and Planning Districts, incentivize use of coordinated planning models which link housing, services and transportation.
- To enhance cost effectiveness, promote and incentivize regional city/county collaboration to address transportation, housing and support service needs across jurisdictions.

## Agency Description

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (the Board) serves as Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council). The Board is authorized to serve as Virginia's DD Council under the *Virginians with Disabilities Act, Code of Virginia 51.5-31-33*. The Board's Federal authority is found in Statute P.L. 106-402, 2000; Subtitle B—Federal Assistance to State Developmental Disabilities Councils; Subtitle 42 USC 15021; Section 121—Purpose. This subtitle provides for funding allotments to support State Councils on Developmental Disabilities in each state to engage in advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities which contribute to a coordinated, consumer and family-centered and directed, comprehensive system of community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that enable individuals with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination, be independent, be productive, and be integrated and included in all facets of community life. As a DD Council, the mission of the Board is as follows:

To create a Commonwealth that advances opportunities for independence, personal decision-making and full participation in community life for individuals with developmental and other disabilities.

The Board's primary source of funding is its federal grant award from the Administration for Community Living under the Department of Health & Human Services. The grant award represents 87% of the Board's approximate \$1.4 total budget. The Board's general fund appropriation is approximately \$185,000 and is used as the match for the federal award.

The Board undertakes its mission by engaging in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities that contribute to developing a comprehensive system of community care that is:

- ✓ Coordinated;
- ✓ Consumer and family directed;
- ✓ Individualized; and
- ✓ Promote self determination

The Board is charged with advising the Governor, General Assembly, and Executive branch agencies on disability policy. It provides leadership and advocacy training programs, and invests in demonstration, research and other grants designed to improve the system of services and supports for individuals with developmental and other disabilities. The Board produces a triennial *Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia* that serves as a comprehensive resource to policymakers, professionals, advocates, individuals with disabilities and families. The most recent edition was published in the fall 2014. The Board also engages in extensive constituent outreach through a variety of media in order to ensure the flow of information on programs, services, supports and policies affecting individuals with developmental and other disabilities and their families.

## Response to §§ 2.2-5510 and 51.5-136

1. If your agency has undertaken any actions to respond to the current and future impact of an aging population, such as needs assessments, strategic planning, or use of best practices, please briefly describe those actions. Please indicate what assistance from DARS could help your agency as it prepares to serve an aging Virginia population.

The Board does not provide any direct services to seniors. As noted in the agency description, the Board is an advocacy and policy entity. The Board did include a review of significant programs serving individuals with developmental and other disabilities who are aging in its *2014 Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia*. The Board has in the past released a competitive request for proposal for a grant that would develop strategies to ensure that individuals with developmental (DD) disabilities could age in place. However, it did not receive adequate proposals after having released the RFP twice and the Board declined to release it a third time at its recent December 2014 Board meeting.

2. Briefly describe your agency's services that are used primarily by older Virginians and the funding streams (types and amounts) that support those services. If these particular services or funding streams are provided in conjunction with other state or local agencies or other for profit or non-profit organizations, please list them.

Not applicable. The Board does not provide direct services.

3. Identify current agency programs specifically designed to serve older Virginians that fall into any of the following eight categories:

- Health Care/Wellness
- Education
- Public Safety (including Adult Abuse Prevention)
- Recreation
- Housing
- Accessibility (including Livable Communities <http://www.vadrs.org/vblc/>)
- Financial Security
- Transportation

Not applicable. The Board does not provide direct services. However, many of the Board's policy recommendations in the area of health care/wellness, housing, accessibility, and transportation, if implemented would benefit older Virginians with and without disabilities. These recommendations can be found in the *2014 Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia, Volume 1*. The Board also participates in a variety of interagency task forces and workgroups addressing senior issues, including the Blueprint for Livable Communities and the No Wrong Door initiative.

4. Is your agency able to meet all of the service demands of older Virginians for the services listed above? If there are any instances where the demand for services exceeds your agency's ability to meet the demand, please indicate the service and the extent of the unmet demand.

Also, if your agency maintains waiting lists for services, please provide this information, including the waiting list numbers for each service.

Not applicable. The Board does not provide direct services.

5. Provide the number of persons, by gender if available, who received services from the agency in each of the past five state fiscal years (FY 2010 through FY2014) who fell into the following age ranges: 60-64; 65-74; 75-84; and 85 and older. If your agency lacks specific information about the numbers of older Virginians it serves but has other evidence indicating that it is serving more or fewer older Virginians than it has in the past, please describe the basis for that estimation.

Not applicable. The Board does not provide direct services.

6. Referring to the services or funding you described in item two, describe any services or funding provided to older Virginians for which the accessibility or availability varies considerably in different parts of the Commonwealth.

Not applicable. The Board does not provide direct services.

7. Over the next five to 10 years, in what ways do you anticipate that an aging population will impact your agency's services, funding streams, or policies? Consider the impact from an increase in the number of older Virginians and whether the needs of older Virginians will differ from those of today's older adults. Please include any anticipated impacts upon the cost of services, changes in type of services or the manner of service delivery, or modifications to agency policies, staffing needs, or procedures.

The Board does not provide direct services. However, the Board anticipates that it will continue to examine the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities (DD), including intellectual disabilities (ID) as they age. As more and more individuals with ID/DD are living and being supported in the community, it will be critical to ensure that they receive the services and supports needed in order to age in place. Many of these individuals will be at risk of institutionalization or re-institutionalization should the Commonwealth not be prepared to 8.

8. Please describe the primary steps that should be taken at the federal, state, or local levels to meet the future demands of older Virginians and to make services delivery more effective and efficient.

Before discussing steps to take, consideration of population need is critical. A recent U.S. Census Bureau report provides a snapshot of disability and demographic characteristics of the elderly during 2008-2012.<sup>1</sup> This report analyzed Census survey data by age groups: Total 65 & over; 65 to 74 years old; 75 to 84 years old; & 85 & older. The report found that respondents identified these three disability issues most frequently:

- ambulatory difficulty (e.g., walking, climbing stairs);

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<sup>1</sup> He, Wan & Larsen, Luke. (December 2014). *Older Americans with a Disability: 2008-2012* (American Community Survey Report, ACS-29). U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- difficulty with independent living (e.g. visiting a doctor’s office, shopping); and
- serious hearing difficulty.

The report added: “The order of these top three types of disability was consistent across age groups, except for those aged 65-74”. For the latter subgroup, the prevalence of hearing difficulty was higher than that of independent living.

Based on constituent comments and its own research<sup>2</sup>, the Board has found that lack of **accessibility – both physical and communicative** – is a major, broad problem experienced by Virginians with a disability at any age.

- Public buildings may have curb cuts, but offices are not designed to accommodate individuals in a wheelchair or who are blind.
- Medical offices do not have either accessible, adaptive equipment (e.g. exam tables, X-Ray machines) or staff trained to accommodate individuals with mobility issues.
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Related to mobility, **the availability of accessible housing and reliable, affordable transportation** must be addressed. To “age in place”, Virginians who are elderly are likely to need home modifications or installation of “smart home” assistive technology. These services come at a cost, which some cannot afford. The availability of safe, affordable housing for lower income individuals generally is very limited statewide.

**Transportation** is critical to maintaining employment, receiving health & other services, meeting basic personal needs and participating in social or civic activities. Many Virginians, with and without a disability, rely on dependable public transportation. Ongoing fiscal strain on local finances has made it increasingly difficult for localities to provide stable, adequate annual funding for public transportation; and too often, to invest in sidewalks and curb cuts to create unobstructed pedestrian routes. In addition, the quality and reliability of Medicaid funded transportation has been an issue raised by individuals with disabilities for several years.

The “boomer” generation as a whole, which has just begun to reach retirement age, has not saved for the future; and their jobs were very negatively impacted by the Great Recession. As boomers age, the risk of disability also rises. A dramatic increase in demand for publicly funded services is likely.

### **Steps that should be taken: Federal**

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. (October 2014). *2014 Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia*. Richmond, Virginia.

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- For localities and Planning Districts, incentivize use of coordinated planning models which link housing, services and transportation.
- To enhance cost effectiveness, promote and incentivize regional city/county collaboration to address transportation, housing and support service needs across jurisdictions.

9. Identify the extent to which your agency provides “customer-oriented” publications and websites that are designed to be “senior-friendly.” If the information you currently provide is not readily accessible to older Virginians, please identify any steps your agency is taking to improve their access to this information.

The Board has been a leader in adopting and in promoting accessible publications and websites. Our website and all posted documents are fully accessible in compliance with federal Section 508. All videos posted online or made available via DVDs are fully captioned for those with hearing impairments. The Board has moved to a “Responsive” web design to some extent. However, at this time VITA does not have technical standards which enable responsive design features for mobile devices, which is a serious limitation.

10. Describe any other services or programs that your agency plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia’s population.

The Board, as noted earlier, does not provide any direct services. The current federal State Plan, 2012-16, includes objectives to improve policies and services which will enable Virginians who are elderly to maintain as much independence and self-determination as possible. The Board will be developing its 2017-2022 federal State Plan in the fall of 2015 and at that time may consider the needs of older Virginians with developmental and other disabilities.

11. Please indicate if your agency is experiencing an increase in employees retiring later and describe any actions your agency is taking or plans to take to accommodate its aging workforce with innovative practices.

The Board has 10 FTEs and 2 P-14 positions. Currently, there are three vacancies: a policy analyst position, a training coordinator position, and an administrative position. The Board had one retirement over the last two years. Currently the Board has agency has five employees eligible for retirement with full benefits within the next 7 years beginning in 2014. This represents 50% of the current authorized position level of 10. One of these staff is already eligible for retirement; one will be eligible in 2018.

The Board has not put in place any specific policies or procedures to accommodate its aging workforce. As a disability services agency, the Board has implemented reasonable accommodations based on disability as needed for staff. All of the program managers have attended Commonwealth Management Institute and the Director of Administration has attended the Virginia Executive Institute. As a small agency, the Board has very limited growth opportunities. This presents both recruitment and retention challenges. Salaries for positions requiring comparable educational and skill levels are higher in larger agencies which can negatively impact recruitment and retention options. Similar difficulties are anticipated for future vacancies whether due to retirement or other reasons as each position requires expertise in multiple areas staff within budgetary limits. The Board provides for professional development opportunities to the maximum extent possible within budget restraints.