

**Report on the Response of  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
to the Impact of the  
Aging of Virginia's Population**



**November 15, 2007**

## **House Bill 2624 Report Addressing the Impact of the Aging of Virginia's Population Virginia Commonwealth University**

As required under Code of Virginia § 2.2-5510, as amended by House Bill 2624 (2007 Session), to state that “*each agency shall report by November 15 of each year to the Department for the Aging its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of the population, according to guidance established by the Secretary of Health and Human Resources;*” Virginia Commonwealth University submits the following report of services, programs, and activities which serve Virginia's older adults.

### **Executive Summary**

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) serves older Virginians in every aspect of its mission of teaching, research, public service and clinical practice. Among the many programs, services and activities VCU provides are the following examples, chosen to illustrate the breadth and depth of VCU's ongoing commitment to serving older Virginians. Further details regarding these examples and VCU's full range of services, programs and activities for older Virginians is contained in the “Data Requested” section of this report.

- VCU provides up to three courses per semester, tuition-free, to Virginia residents at least 60 years of age. In addition to access to traditional courses, VCU invites interested adults of all ages in the Richmond area to become members of The Commonwealth Society, where a series of exciting topics provide a unique educational experience without the stress of papers, exams or grades.
- VCU proudly hosts The Virginia Center on Aging (VCOA), which is home to a number of programs and services for older adults. The only such center in the Commonwealth, VCOA manages the VCU Elderhostel program, the largest Elderhostel program in the Commonwealth, and the 16<sup>th</sup> largest in the country. VCOA also disseminates aging-related information and resources to older adults and their families and caregivers through its quarterly publication *Age in Action* and other educational materials; sends e-mail notices in bulk periodically to older Virginians and others on available educational and training experiences being offered throughout Virginia; and maintains a web site (<http://www.vcu.edu/vcoa>) listing books, videos, and other materials that are available on loan free to Virginians and providing direct links to information and resources provided by other agencies that serve older adults.
- VCU's Department of Gerontology, in addition to housing academic programs training gerontological specialists, is the home of two outstanding programs serving elders in the Commonwealth, ElderFriends and ElderCare. ElderFriends is a special volunteer program that provides companionship, outreach and advocacy through intergenerational relationships. The ElderCare Education and Support Group, sponsored by the

Department of Gerontology and VCU Human Resources, holds monthly sessions to assist VCU employees who are caring for elderly relatives or friends.

- VCU ranked number 30 on AARP's list of the top 50 employers nationwide for fairness of policies and practices toward older workers.
- VCU's Division of Human Resources provide information to VCU employees approaching or planning for retirement, including an annual pre-retirement symposium and a series of investment education seminars.
- Retired faculty are valued members of the VCU community and receive a number of continuing benefits for their service to VCU and the Commonwealth. VCU Human Resources maintains a retiree roster of individuals who may be interested in returning to VCU to work on a special project or on a temporary basis.
- VCU's Division of Human Resources provide information to VCU employees caring for elderly parents or friends, for example, on long-term care options, in-home care, elder law, nutrition, social activities, finding an attorney specializing in senior citizens' issues, information on the cost of nursing homes, or even the phone number and fees for Richmond's Meals on Wheels.
- In April, Virginia Commonwealth University Health System became the first health system in the region to offer an on-site, adult day care center for employee dependents.
- VCU's School of Social Work operates the Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities (VISSTA), a leader in managing development and delivery of training for state and local Virginia Department of Social Services employees, including those serving older adults. Interdisciplinary arrangements between the Gerontology Program and the School of Social Work allows graduate students in Social Work interested in working with elderly persons or in gerontological programs to earn a Certificate in Aging Studies while completing the Master of Social Work degree requirements. Students who are interested in obtaining the Certificate in Aging Studies with an emphasis in long term care administration may complete additional coursework in Gerontology to earn this specialization credential that enables students to take the licensure exam for nursing home administration.
- Through education of health care students and professionals and clinical and practice research, the Geriatric Pharmacotherapy Program in VCU's Department of Pharmacy makes significant contributions to improve the health of elderly people and achieve desirable therapy outcomes.
- VCU's School of Medicine provides the Elder Care and Movement Disorders Program in the Department of Neurosurgery, providing a common area where participants can focus their efforts on the treatment of patients with diseases using new technologies for neuromodulation. The School of Medicine's Section of Geriatric Medicine in the Department of Internal Medicine provides a continuum of interdisciplinary medical care

including long-term care facilities, home care and house calls, “transitional care” (intensive case management immediately post-hospital), ambulatory care, palliative care, and in-patient consultation at VCU Medical Center.

- VCU’s Center for Corporate Education at the School of Business and the Department of Gerontology in its School of Allied Health Professions, designs and offers the VCU Virginia Association of Nonprofit Homes for the Aging (VANHA) Leadership Institute, an intensive one-year program specifically designed for professionals serving the Senior/Aging/Retirement population.

### **Agency Description**

VCU is a new kind of research university – one that puts learning at the center of all that it does. VCU strives to focus all activities of the university directly on the creation of learning and is dedicated to excellence in education in an atmosphere of free inquiry and scholarship so that students may realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment to learning and service. VCU is engaged with and committed to the community of which it is a part, and purposefully and proudly provides access and opportunity that many major universities do not, while embracing and celebrating diversity in the student body, faculty staff and administration. VCU recognizes that all the activities of the university – teaching, research, service and patient care – provide opportunities to learn. This approach allows VCU to prepare students to thrive in a complex, interdependent, diverse and constantly changing world.

### **Data Requested**

1. To the extent such data is available, the number of persons who received services from the agency in the past fiscal year who fell into each of the following age ranges: 65-74; 75-84; and 85 and older. If the agency can provide data that compares such numbers to numbers of senior citizens served in the past, please do so. If the agency lacks specific information about the numbers of senior citizens it serves, but has other evidence indicating that it is serving more or fewer senior citizens than it has in the past, please describe the basis for that estimation.

#### Free Tuition

Under the provisions of the Senior Citizens’ Higher Education Act, Virginia residents at least 60 years of age are eligible to register for up to three courses per semester, tuition-free. The table below provides the information on the age ranges of senior citizens’ exercising this option at VCU in the past two academic years.

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Fall 2006 – Summer 2007</b>	<b>Fall 2005 – Summer 2006</b>
60 - 64	47	36
65 – 74	52	67
75 - 84	12	21
85 & older	3	4
<b>Total</b>	114	128

### Virginia Center on Aging

The Virginia Center on Aging at Virginia Commonwealth University was created by the General Assembly to be “an interdisciplinary study, research, [and] information and resource facility for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Virginia Center on Aging is the only such center in the Commonwealth, and is home to a number of programs and services for older adults, although not exclusively targeted for those 65 and older:

- The VCU Elderhostel program is the largest Elderhostel program in the Commonwealth, and the 16<sup>th</sup> largest in the country. With Elderhostel older adult learning programs based in Richmond, Natural Bridge, and Staunton, it serves approximately 1,200 learners annually ages 55 and older from Virginia and throughout the United States.
- The Virginia Center on Aging is a founding sponsor and assists in the administration of the Lifelong Learning Institute in Chesterfield, which offers over 120 courses to 360 midlife and older adults each year. The Lifelong Learning Institute is designed to meet the educational and social enrichment needs of adults age 50 and "better".
- Through its *Age in Action* quarterly publication and other educational materials, the Virginia Center for Aging disseminates aging-related information and resources to older adults and their families and caregivers. *Age in Action*, published jointly with the Virginia Department for the Aging and recognized as the best aging-related publication in the South by the Southern Gerontological Society, reaches approximately 5,900 postal and e-mail addresses quarterly. The Virginia Center on Aging also sends e-mail notices in bulk periodically to older Virginians and others on available educational and training experiences being offered throughout Virginia. In addition, the Center’s Web site (<http://www.vcu.edu/vcoa>) lists books, videos, and other materials that are available on loan free to Virginians, maintains archives on past issues of *Age in Action*, and provides direct links to information and resources provided by other agencies that serve older adults.

### Department of Gerontology

VCU’s Department of Gerontology, in addition to academic programs training gerontological specialists, is the home of two outstanding programs serving elders in the Commonwealth, ElderFriends and ElderCare:

- ElderFriends is a special volunteer program that provides companionship, outreach and advocacy through intergenerational relationships. Successfully launched in Seattle in 1996, VCU faculty and staff replicated this proven model in the Richmond area, housed in VCU's Department of Gerontology. The aim is to relieve isolation and loneliness among low income, "shut in" elders. The elders in the program receive socialization services to ensure that they ward off depression and are able to age in place for as long as possible. ElderFriends tracks at least four outcomes: 1) decreased social isolation; 2) increased knowledge of community-based resources; 3) increased social support; and 4) increased access of services. During the 2006-2007 year, volunteers donated almost 1,150 hours of service to elders.
- The Eldercare Education and Support Program originated from a collaborative effort between the Department of Gerontology and Senior Connections, the local Area Agency on Aging. The Department of Gerontology has continued in the role of providing program guidance and development in partnership with Human Resources to address employees' Eldercare needs. An ElderCare Education and Support Group for those who are caring for elderly relatives or friends meets monthly. During the period September 2006-August 2007, 12 sessions were offered, serving 80 employees caring for elder family members in the Commonwealth and at a distance.
- Additional phone or face to face eldercare support consultation has been provided by the departmental Geriatric Care Manager for more than 25 employees caring for elder family members and loved ones.

#### VCU Human Resources

VCU's Division of Human Resources has an annual Pre-retirement Symposium and a series of Investment Education seminars helpful to those who are approaching or planning for retirement. In partnership with the VCU Department of Gerontology, pre-retirement seminars have included topics on life after work and taking care of elderly parents. The Division also maintains a Retiree Roster of individuals who may be interested in returning to VCU to work on a special project or on a temporary basis.

2. Identify the agency services that are utilized by senior citizens 65 and older in significant numbers. Indicate whether the agency has the capacity at present to serve all interested seniors or whether the demand for certain services exceeds the agency's capacity. If so, does the agency maintain waiting lists for services?

#### Services for Retired Faculty

Retired faculty are valued members of the VCU community and receive a number of continuing benefits for their service to VCU and the Commonwealth. Retired faculty are entitled to free parking; keep their VCU email accounts and receive discounts for internet access; have the same access and borrowing privileges at VCU Libraries as active faculty, and are provided with discounts for the VCU Bookstores, VCU musical productions, VCU Theatre tickets, and VCU sporting events. The Retired Faculty Council meets four times a

year and is open to all retired faculty. There are no waiting lists for services to retired faculty.

#### Virginia Center on Aging

As noted above, the Virginia Center on Aging at Virginia Commonwealth University was created by the General Assembly to be “an interdisciplinary study, research, [and] information and resource facility for the Commonwealth of Virginia.” While there are limits on participation in the Center’s programs, there are no waiting lists for those programs that directly serve older adults.

#### Free Tuition

As noted above, under the provisions of the Senior Citizens’ Higher Education Act, Virginia residents at least 60 years of age are eligible to register for up to three courses per semester, tuition-free. Although senior citizens are admitted to a course after all tuition-paying students have been accommodated, there have been no participation issues and therefore, no waiting lists for services.

#### Outreach Programs

VCU invites interested adults of all ages in the Richmond area to become members of The Commonwealth Society. Each semester the society offers a series of exciting topics providing a unique educational experience. These college-level courses offer adults the opportunity to learn and develop interests without the college-level stress of no papers, exams or grades. In addition to attending courses, members of The Commonwealth Society are invited to participate in social and travel opportunities, lectures and brown bag lunches. There are no waiting lists for the membership in The Commonwealth Society.

#### Employee Eldercare Support

VCU offers employees access to a pool of donated leave time that employees can use to care for elderly family members. In addition, VCU offers workplace programs for employees including the Health and Benefits Fair, Mini- Eldercare Fair, and Retirement Planning Seminars. There are no waiting lists for these eldercare support programs.

#### Adult Day Services

In April, the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCUHS) became the first health system in the region to offer an on-site, adult day care center for employee dependents. The VCU Health System recently became licensed to open the site for dependents, whether they are elderly or physically or mentally disabled, and is the first employer of its kind that is not in the primary business of adult or elder care to offer such a service. The new program is sponsored by Human Resources’ Workforce Development, Family Care Services, the Child Care Center, VCU’s Department of Gerontology and the VCUHS Geriatric Service Line. Though the facility is licensed for 11 adults, VCU will provide services for eight elders requiring minimal intervention.

3. Identify current agency programs, specifically designed to serve seniors 65 and older, that fall into any of the following six categories: Health Care/Wellness; Education; Public Safety; Recreation; Financial Security (including Housing); and Transportation.

#### Health Care/Wellness

VCU's Human Resources Work/Life Resources can provide information on long-term care options, in-home care, elder law, nutrition, social activities, finding an attorney specializing in senior citizens' issues, information on the cost of nursing homes, or even the phone number and fees for Richmond's Meals on Wheels.

The Virginia Center on Aging, as a leading partner in the Area Planning and Services Committee on Aging with Lifelong Disabilities, annually hosts conferences and workshops for older Virginians who are family caregivers, agency managers, and direct service providers on aging- and disabilities-related subjects that include nutrition, diabetes, communicating with health care providers, healthy cooking, wellness assessment protocols, dementia, end-of-life care, and more.

The School of Social Work operates the Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities (VISSTA). Established in 1990, VISSTA has proven itself a leader in managing development and delivery of dynamic training for state and local Virginia Department of Social Services employees, including those serving older adults.

#### Public Safety

The Virginia Center on Aging is lead partner in the Central Virginia Training Alliance to Stop Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation. This coalition of metro Richmond law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, victim services programs, aging/adult protective services, and other community stakeholders is piloting a three-year, multidisciplinary training initiative for law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Participating organizations will engage in a review of their policies and protocols, as well as work collaboratively to improve the identification, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of cases of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation, including domestic violence and sexual assault. This three-year project is funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice.

#### Recreation

The university has annual alumni events specifically for Richmond Professional Institute (RPI) graduates. RPI existed under that name from 1939 until 1968 when MCV and RPI merged to become Virginia Commonwealth University. The overwhelming majority of RPI graduates are in the age range of 65 and older. While there are some educational components of the annual event, the participants view it as an opportunity to socialize with other alumni in their graduating classes.

4. Identify the extent to which your agency provides “consumer-oriented” publications and websites online that are designed to be “senior-friendly.” If the information you currently provide is not readily accessible to seniors, identify any steps your agency is taking to improve accessibility.

While the VCU Web site is designed to serve our primary constituencies – current and prospective students, parents, faculty, staff, and alumni – the VCU Web site does offer a number of features that make it “senior-friendly.” All Web pages linking to the main VCU Web site are required to be accessible to the visually impaired; the main VCU Web site has recently been redesigned to make it easier for members of the community, including older adults, to find information. Furthermore, the VCU Web site provides up-to-date information about services for retired faculty, and employment opportunities for older adults. Finally, as noted above, the Virginia Center for Aging maintains a senior friendly website, publishes *Age in Action* and other aging-related information and resources for older adults and their families and caregivers, and provides direct links to information and resources provided by other agencies that serve older adults through its website.

5. Describe the effect that the aging of the agency’s own workforce will have on its ability to deliver services. Consider the number of retirements expected in the next two years, the effect these retirements might have (e.g., loss of leadership or institutional knowledge in certain programs), how losses might be replaced (e.g., promotions or transfers, recruitment, use of wage staff, including retirees, re-engineering, outsourcing), and the costs or savings from the replacements (e.g., staff development cost, salary savings). This item might be addressed by summarizing relevant portions of the agency’s workforce plan.

Although a significant number of VCU’s full- and part-time benefited workforce is currently eligible for full or reduced retirement benefits, and well over two-thirds of our key leaders are over fifty years old, VCU does not expect any impact on the ability to deliver services. Faculty and staff retirements are opportunities for promotions and transfers, new hires, utilizing wage staff and, on occasion, rehiring retired faculty. Since 1999, VCU’s instructional faculty who are 65 and older represent approximately 4 - 4.5% of total instructional faculty.

VCU has begun the process of institutionalizing workforce planning. Workforce planning provides a general review of future and current needs throughout the University as well as targets areas of critical need. Workforce planning includes the development of various tools to assist managers in making appropriate recruitment and retention decisions. The University offers numerous leadership training and development programs as well as staff development opportunities.

As an example of the programs offered, the Grace E. Harris Institute sponsors a leadership development program for faculty and staff each year. The leadership development program is designed to enhance the knowledge, skills and experience of those in key leadership roles at VCU. During the program, participants learn about issues in higher education and at

VCU, examine their own leadership strengths and challenges, meet regularly with a mentor from senior administration, and immerse themselves in real-world team projects. Fifty-two VCU faculty and staff members from both campuses have completed the highly successful training program.

Other programs support skill development and internal promotions and prepare for succession planning. Additionally, to preserve and allow for the transfer of institutional knowledge, VCU has begun to implement various programs geared towards continued contributions and service following retirement.

6. Describe any other services or programs that the agency has implemented or plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.

VCU has made a concerted effort to recruit mature workers by advertising in targeted newspapers, through the internet, and by developing a healthy-employee referral system. VCU values mature workers and hires these workers on an hourly or adjunct instructor basis.

VCU ranked No. 30 on AARP's list of the top 50 employers nationwide for fairness of policies and practices toward older workers. In addition to recruiting, VCU was judged in categories such as workplace culture, continued opportunities, health benefits, financial benefits, alternative work arrangements, opportunities for retirees and the age of its workforce.

VCU has also demonstrated its ongoing commitment to serving older adults through the adoption of its strategic plan: *VCU 2020 Vision for Excellence*. *VCU 2020* calls for a number of initiatives that will improve or increase VCU's services for older adults:

- Improving communication between VCU and its communities, including older adults, to increase access to the services and expertise VCU has to offer;
- Being a leader in the Commonwealth among those working to solve the problems of health disparities among Virginians, including those among older adults;
- Identifying and achieving the ideal mix of part-time and full-time faculty, including the optimal use of VCU's retired faculty in teaching, research, and service activities;
- Developing a University-wide plan for workforce transition planning among VCU's faculty and staff, including continued engagement of the large numbers of VCU's faculty and staff who will be retiring over the next decade; and
- Expanding education, research and patient care services to all Virginians, including older adults.

As an institution of higher education, VCU provides many educational programs focused on the aging population. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

VCU is addressing the need for social workers trained in gerontology. The growth of the aging population has stimulated services for the elderly, in both institutions and communities. With a burgeoning aged population comes the need for a spectrum of social services to help

older persons cope with possible health and social problems and with the daily necessities of living. The social worker is frequently the link between an older person, his/her family, and the complex array of services designed to provide help. Social workers are instrumental in both planning and delivering services for elderly persons. The School of Social Work in cooperation with the Gerontology Program at VCU provides students with a unique opportunity in social work and gerontology. Interdisciplinary arrangements with the Gerontology Program allow School of Social Work graduate students (MSW) interested in work with elderly persons or in gerontological programs to earn a Certificate in Aging Studies while completing Master of Social Work degree requirements. Students who are interested in obtaining the Certificate in Aging Studies with an emphasis in long term care administration may complete additional coursework in gerontology to earn this specialization credential that enables students to take the licensure exam for nursing home administration.

Through education of health care students and professionals and clinical and practice research, the Geriatric Pharmacotherapy Program in VCU's Department of Pharmacy makes significant contributions to improve the health of elderly people and achieve desirable therapy outcomes. The Geriatric Pharmacotherapy Program is dedicated to improving drug therapy outcomes in elderly patients and being a nationally recognized leader in geriatric pharmacotherapy. The geriatric pharmacotherapy program focuses its research activities in community dwelling elderly and in elderly residing in assisted living facilities. These areas have been selected because this is where the majority of elderly people reside and where little is known about the medication use process and drug therapy outcomes. Results from the program's research will help pharmacists recommend drug therapy and identify areas where pharmacists contribute to positive clinical outcomes in elderly patients. The geriatrics program uses a team approach and collaborates with pharmacists and practitioners from other health care disciplines to conduct patient-focused research. Research conducted by the faculty of the geriatric pharmacotherapy program focuses in the following areas:

- Clinical outcomes from drug therapy
- Patient outcomes of pharmacist's interventions, and
- Economic analysis of drug therapy in the elderly.

The Elder Care and Movement Disorders Program in the Department of Neurosurgery provides a common area where participants can focus their efforts on the treatment of patients with diseases using new technologies for neuromodulation. An explosion of technological advances has made newer and more sophisticated treatments available to patients with a variety of neurological diseases. There are no other programs in the region which address such a wide variety of clinical problems.

VCU's School of Medicine's Section of Geriatric Medicine in the Department of Internal Medicine provides a continuum of interdisciplinary medical care including long-term care facilities, home care and house calls, "transitional care" (intensive case management immediately post-hospital), ambulatory care, palliative care, and in-patient consultation at VCU Medical Center. Faculty members direct two large-community nursing homes and have practices of 50 or more patients in four facilities. Consistent with the increased need for geriatric expertise in internal medicine, this section has a significant role in the education of students, housestaff from several departments, other faculty members and community

physicians. This section is active locally and nationally with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and is engaged in research on quality of care for the frail and the pre-frail, plus selected specific problems including erectile dysfunction, hypertension and osteoporosis.

The Geriatrics Fellowship Training Program offered through the Department of Internal Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center and McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center is designed to train leaders who will provide clinical care for older people, teach others how to care for older people and conduct research to better understand the aging process.

VCU's Virginia Association of Nonprofit Homes for the Aging (VANHA) Leadership Institute is an intensive one year program specifically designed for professionals serving the Senior/Aging/Retirement population. Designed by the Center for Corporate Education at the School of Business and the Department of Gerontology, School of Allied Health Professions, the program consists of three tracks: professional development, leadership development, and aging studies. Applicants must have a minimum of four years in the Nursing Home/Assisted Living field, be mid-level to senior-level in the institution, and be nominated by their CEO.