



# Your Future

Newsletter of the **Boston Partnership for Older Adults**

## Spring 2007

March 2007

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The Boston Partnership for Older Adults is a coalition of over 200 people and organizations working to ensure that all older adults have the support and resources needed to age with dignity.

Through education, improved access to information and services, as well as increased collaboration among Boston's aging service providers and funders, we are striving to build a system for older adults and their care partners that values independence and choice. Together with the entire city of Boston we are enhancing the services and support that enables older adults to remain active and vibrant members of our community



At this time we would like to introduce you to Janet Prenskey and Edward J. Ford two of the many partners that make *The Boston Partnership for Older Adults* the outstanding organization that it is.

### Janet Prenskey



**JANET PRENSKY is Senior Vice President of Aigner Associates, a strategic marketing and public relations agency in Boston, MA.**

**Her public relations clients have included:**

British Airways; the Atrium Mall, CambridgeSide Galleria, Northshore Mall, South Shore Plaza and many other New England malls; WJMN-FM, WBMX-FM, WBZ-AM, WTKK-FM, WBOS-FM; Hoyt's Cinemas; New England Development; Continental Airlines; Jordan Marsh; the New England Spring Flower Show; the Colonnade Hotel;

Dunkin Donuts; Panera Bread; The Pinehills; iParty; Bruegger's Bagel Bakery; Nancy Kerrigan; the New England Home Show; the Boston Center for Adult Education; Mount Auburn Hospital; the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation; the American Camp Association; Build-A-Bear; Galyan's; The Boston Music Awards; the Earth Day Concert; Peapod; TNT Vacations; the Sports Museum of New England and many others.

In addition to Ms. Prenskey's public relations experience, she has been a broadcaster and writer for many years. She is currently Co-Host of "Boomer Broads with Attitude" heard locally on WBIX-AM. She was Boston's first female sports radio talkhost in 1991/92 for WEEI-Radio, a talk show host for WBZ-AM, the "voice" for WBZ-TV, a radio and television traffic reporter and a broadcast journalist for CBS-Radio and WBZ-TV. She is the author of "Everywoman's Guide to Auto Racing" for Avery Publishing and is in the process of writing "Why Save More When You Can Just Spend Less," also for Avery.

Ms. Prenskey has taught a course on Radio Announcing for Emerson College and served on the Boston Sports Advisory Council. She has worked on a pro bono capacity for the Elderly Commission of Boston, the Boston Partnership for Older Adults and The New England Women's Fund. In her capacity with the New England Women's Fund, Ms. Prenskey helped create the New England Women's Sports Award Reception and the New England Women's Sports Hall of Fame. .

## Edward J. Ford



**Ed Ford** has been a member of Boston Prime Timers for over 15 years and has been on the Board for 13 years, and serving as President for the past eight. Boston Prime Timers is a social, educational and support network for gay and bisexual, senior men which was founded in Boston 20 years ago. Prime Timers has become a world wide social organization with over 65 chapters on 3 continents, with over 6000 members.

Unfortunately, ageism is a reality in both the mainstream and gay communities. Ed has been influential in forming collaborations with other LGBT organizations such as The Male Center, part of AIDS Action. In June, 2006 Ed helped organize the first intergenerational discussion group with The Male Center.

Since being invited to join the community at United South End Settlements, Ed has forged a solid relationship between Boston Prime Timers and the community, collaborating with USES to produce "Gay Stories of the South End" in October 2005, a panel that he moderated. For the past four years, Ed has been on the steering committee of the LGBT Aging Project. The Project works to ensure that LGBT elders and their caregivers have equal access to the benefits, protections, and aging programs, services, and institutions that their heterosexual neighbors rely on, and take for granted. Ed is a founding member of the Pride Senior Dance, "It's about Time!" which has happened during June for the past 3 years. Two years ago, Ed was part of the team at Ethos that organized the first LGBT weekly meal site each Thursday, at Emmanuel

Church on Newbury Street.

In June, 2006, Ed was invited to participate with 30 other LGBT leaders who converged on Washington, D.C. for the inaugural National LGBT Aging Roundtable.

For the past three years Ed has been on the Board of the Boston Partnership for Older Adults, as an openly gay man, representing Boston Prime Timers. He is also an active member of the PR committee. Ed hosts the monthly cable news program Agewise Boston- Bridging Generations, on BNN-TV which informs the community of the work of the Partnership. "Being invited to join this inspiring group was a logical addition to my advocacy work. And, as a life long resident of Boston, I am truly proud to participate in this forward thinking, highly organized and focused group of experts who are improving and enhancing our system of support for older adults, which gives me hope that I can indeed "age in place."

## Hidden Issues



### **A BOSTON PERSPECTIVE ON MENTAL AND COGNITIVE HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG OLDER ADULTS**

As the projected number of older adults with a mental illness increases to 15 million in the next 25 years, mental health services for Boston's older adults seen lacking according to newly published report.

Recently, Senator Steven Tolman & Representative Ruth B. Balser hosted an event at the State House attended by over 100 people including EOEA Secretary Jennifer Carey Davis, DMH Commissioner Elizabeth Childs, and Boston's Elderly

Commissioner Eliza Greenberg to release the Boston Partnership for Older Adults' (BPOA) report on the results of a major research project and analysis on the status of mental health among older adults in Boston.

The report, "Hidden Issues: A Boston Perspective on Mental and Cognitive Health and Substance Abuse Among Older Adults" contains startling and alarming data about older adults and their access and use of mental, cognitive and substance abuse services and the potential impact of major demographic shifts on these services. The study which was conducted by the BPOA's Mental & Cognitive Health Committee concludes that older adults who require mental health support and intervention are significantly underserved, and that when care is given, these older adults often receive inappropriate treatment. The report includes recommendations, a call to action and advocates for a delivery system which recognizes and responds to the specific and unique needs of older adults. Without the recommended system changes, the report's authors, who include experts in the fields of mental health and gerontology, suggest that the human and financial costs will be staggering as the Commonwealth and the nation face the largest demographic shift in the number of people over the age of 65 years in human history. Among the findings, the following statistics seemed particularly alarming and surprising:

1. The number of older adults with a mental illness is projected to increase to 15 million in the next 25 years, almost four times what that number was in 1970.
2. As many as 20% of older adults living in the community and 37% seen in primary care settings experience symptoms of depression.
3. Up to 17% of older adults misuse alcohol and prescription drugs.
4. At least 1/3 of older adults with Alzheimer's will also experience psychiatric illnesses, and up to 50% of their primary family caregivers will experience clinical depression.
5. A 2005 survey of Massachusetts Area Service Access Point (ASAP) homecare agencies found that from 1,050 to 3,500 of the 7,000 older adults who received ASAP services in the Boston area required some type of mental health intervention.

Copies of the report can be downloaded from the BPOA website or contact Gordon Burns at [info@bostonolderadults.org](mailto:info@bostonolderadults.org)

## BPOA ANNUAL MEETING FOUNDERS AWARD



Elderly Commissioner Greenberg accepts BPOA Founders Award for Mayor Thomas M Menino at BPOA Annual Meeting. Award presented by Elise Bolda, Ph. D. from Community Partnerships for Older Adults, a national initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The award was presented to Mayor Menino for "His outstanding commitment to older adults in the City of Boston and his vision in making Boston an elder friendly city"

## BPOA ANNUAL MEETING AWARDS



Executive Director Emily Shea and BPOA President, Ann Hartstein present awards to EOEI Secretary Jennifer Davis Carey and DPH Commissioner Elizabeth Childs, MD at 2007 Annual Meeting attended by over 100 members and guests.

Secretary Carey & Commissioner Childs were recognized for their commitment and dedication to improving access to mental & cognitive health care for older adults.

## Aging with Dignity in Massachusetts – An Ethical Approach



**Dear BPOA Members,** In keeping with our commitment to advocate for and with older adults, I would like to share with you the document, Aging with Dignity in Massachusetts – An Ethical Approach that I submitted to the Patrick-Murray transition team on behalf of the BPOA. As we all know, the population of older adults in Boston is projected to increase by over 30% in the next twenty years. We must continue to address the current and growing needs of older adults in Boston and strengthen the system in preparation for the needs of tomorrow in order for us all to age with dignity. Warm regards,

**Emily Shea, Executive Director, Boston Partnership for Older Adults**

**1. Restoring Leadership** Give older adults a voice through a strong Executive Office of Elder Affairs headed by a Secretary that reports directly to the Governor.

### **2. Rebalancing Long Term Care**

- Set a goal of a 50/50 split in dollars spent on community and institutional care by the year 2010.
- Move funds into community based services and secure federal matching funds.
- Make implementing the Equal Choice legislation a priority.
- Support public/private partnerships that seek innovative ways of providing community care for older adults.
- Continue to expand MassHealth coverage for older adults by seeking federal waivers. Apply the current more liberal income and asset criteria for those under 65 and older adults seeking personal care attendants, to all older adults, regardless of age and medical needs.
- Support the expansion of consumer- directed care options for older adults who have the capacity to choose and preference for services they need to live independently in the community.

### **3. Expanding Education and Outreach Services**

- Expand outreach, education, and information and referral services in all primary languages so that older adults know what programs, services, and government benefits are available and how to access them.

- Improve the cultural and linguistic competency of existing eldercare information and referral resources.

#### **4. Cutting Prescription Drug Costs**

- Increase outreach to older adults who qualify for the state Prescription Advantage program and develop a simplified, user-friendly access system.
- Reduce the cost of prescription drugs through negotiated bulk purchases and the development of new channels of supply.

#### **5. Coordinated Healthcare**

- Develop a health system for older adults that is better coordinated, easier to navigate, linguistically and culturally appropriate services, and less expensive. Improve the coordination among health care and home care providers, caregivers and older adults.
- Increase awareness of mental and cognitive health issues and address the critical shortage of mental and cognitive health services for the Commonwealth's burgeoning older adult population.

#### **6. Promoting Work and Civic Engagement Opportunities**

- Promote work and civic engagement opportunities for older adults through expanding retraining programs, instituting a volunteering-for-tax-credit program, and working with businesses to recruit and retain older workers.
- Work with local businesses and communities across the Commonwealth to create elder friendly businesses.

#### **7. Transportation**

- Develop a local transportation system that is accessible and affordable for older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Make non-medical transportation an allowable expense for older adults enrolled in state home care programs.
- Educate and train transit workers to:
  1. Respect all transportation users, especially older adults and individuals with disabilities
  2. Be sensitive to the disability conditions and language that offends and intimidates older adults and individuals with disabilities
  3. And be familiar with the ADA and state regulations as well as policies and procedures

#### **8. Housing**

- Eliminate older adult homelessness by increasing the availability of affordable housing for older adults across the Commonwealth.
- Revive the Section 707 program, which provides state financed mobile vouchers similar to Section 8 vouchers.
- Fund outreach efforts to improve utilization of state "circuit breaker" property tax credit.
- Senior housing should be a safe place for older adults to live.

#### **9. Elder Protection**

- Strengthen the system that protects older women and men from physical and sexual abuse and from financial exploitation and self neglect.
- Reform antiquated guardianship laws to strengthen protections for older adults, including appointment of counsel for proposed wards, particularly if the proposed guardian intends to place the older adult in a nursing home. Pass a public guardianship law that creates a public guardianship commission to improve the quality of guardianship services.
- Pass a statute similar to a Maine law which creates a rebuttable presumption of fraud when an older adult is unrepresented and transfers his/her house for less than fair value.
- Strengthen protections for elders and other consumers against unscrupulous debt collectors, as documented in the recent Boston Globe series, Debtors' Hell, by:
  1. Tightening requirements on creditors to prove the debt
  2. Giving proper notice to the debtor
  3. Changing small claims court procedures to require that debt collection procedures be dismissed when a person is clearly judgment proof, to prevent continuous harassment
  4. And, making the homestead exemption, which protects many homeowners from creditors, automatic as it is in many states, instead of subject to application.

#### **10. Cultural Competency**

- Strengthen the capacity of the aging network to serve the growing diversity of elders by mandating and funding cultural competency training, including training on sexual orientation and gender identity. Insure that all state human service programs, especially Medicaid, fully comply with the Supreme Judicial Court's Goodridge decision.



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