

**Progress Report: Addressing the Impact of an Aging Population
Virginia Department of Health**

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH), with direction from the State Board of Health, believes that even though aging is inevitable, sound public policy promoting wise personal lifestyle choices can go a long way in helping Virginians age with health and dignity. VDH has long been an advocate for addressing the needs of our citizens to age in a healthy manner, planning for their continued health and providing services to help achieve that goal. The VDH Strategic Plan addresses these issues in multiple areas, and will be amended as new needs and programs arise.

VDH has been an active participant in National Governors Association Policy Forums (“A Lifetime of Health and Dignity”) and Policy Academies (“Promotion of Healthy Aging in Virginia: Making Wellness the Rule and Not the Exception” and Controlling Chronic Disease”). VDH has joined with the Department of Aging in the past to obtain federal grants to support pilot programs for seniors and is currently awaiting a new grant to expand the evidence-based program of Chronic Disease Self-Management for Older Adults in Rural Southwest and Northeast Virginia. Implementation of that grant will be through local Area Agencies on Aging.

Senior citizens are served by VDH in multiple programs, many of which are not limited to their age groups (e.g., travel vaccination advice and administration, and cervical Pap smears for cancer screening). Table 1 shows the number of seniors served by age groups. Note that these numbers are for people served within actual local health departments and will not include people served in various outreach programs across the Commonwealth. The VDH and Board of Health campaign for preventing and managing chronic diseases has a direct impact on seniors. Chronic conditions cause almost half of all disabilities among Americans. At least 80 percent of adults 65 and over have at least one chronic condition. Expenditures for chronic diseases consume 78 per cent of all health care spending.

Table 1
Number of Senior Citizens Served by Virginia Department of Health
FY2003 – FY2006

Fiscal Year	Age Range	Unduplicated Patient Count	Visit Count
FY2006	65-74	16996	29399
FY2006	75-84	11364	22039
FY2006	85+Over	4534	10366
FY2005	65-74	25827	40027
FY2005	75-84	18592	31141
FY2005	85+Over	6705	13562
FY2004	65-74	15099	31036
FY2004	75-84	9818	23031
FY2004	85+Over	3983	13169
FY2003	65-74	15150	31541
FY2003	75-84	10119	25042
FY2003	85+Over	3905	14696

Source: VDH Office of Information Management.

VDH, through collaboration with many other agencies, has developed statewide plans addressing arthritis, asthma, cancer prevention and control, diabetes and cardiovascular health. Each plan includes strategies related to the promotion of self-management.

VDH programs focusing on seniors include:

- Senior citizen influenza and pneumonia vaccination programs are administered through local health departments. State contracts ensure outreach to many senior citizen centers and nursing homes. This program is open to all seniors on a sliding scale fee basis, so any future service limitations will be based on vaccine availability rather than financial constraints.
- A month-long public relations campaign in February 2006 promoted Healthy Aging through a Healthy Lifestyle.
- Outreach programs provide smoke detectors/alarms in high-risk areas of the Commonwealth. When the recipient is a senior, the visit also includes counseling on fall prevention and home safety.
- Outreach programs reduce or prevent osteoporosis in women.
- VDH works to improve access to mammograms and Pap smears for women age 40-65, with primary emphasis on the 50-65 group. This program is financially constrained. Efforts last year resulted in increased funding from the General Assembly.
- Health promotion programs for people with disabilities include many seniors. Program replication in additional communities is on going, but faces financial constraints. Alternative funding is being actively sought.
- VDH provides money for the State Pharmacy Assist Program. VDH anticipates financial constraints as the at-risk population grows. VDH and the Department for the Aging co-sponsor a toll free number providing information on free prescription drugs for seniors.
- VDH pays premiums and co-payments for members of the AIDS Drug Assistance program who are 65 and older. The number of Virginians in this age group will grow. This is a relatively new program for VDH, therefore requesting additional funds from the General Assembly will have to wait until a financial history has been developed.

VDH provides numerous consumer-oriented publications on chronic disease prevention and self-management, unintentional injuries, child health and development (including the New Parent's Toolkit), suicide and women's health. VDH participated on the Governor's Task Force that added a Healthy Aging section to the SeniorNavigator Web site. The VDH Web site also contains information on all VDH programs as well as links to federal, state and local programs and resources related to the specific topic but not sponsored or published by VDH. These sites are up-dated as new information becomes available.