Many older adults hope to remain in their homes and their communities as they age. Over the years, it may become harder to leave the house or to cook. The Home-Delivered Meal program, also known as Meals on Wheels, can help older adults to live independently with dignity for as long as they wish and are able to do so.

Marin’s Area Agency on Aging (AAA) provided over 80,000 meals to Marin’s homebound and frail older adults last year. Funded by the Older Americans Act, the meals are made by Sonoma’s Council on Aging and are delivered throughout Marin by Whistlestop and West Marin Senior Services (WMSS). Recipients can receive 3-7 meals per week. Amena Hajjar, the WMSS nutrition program coordinator said, “It gives me a real sense of accomplishment in being able to supply older adults in need with continuous nutritious meals, hand delivered to their remote homes in the West Marin area.”

Ms. Leona of Tiburon said, “The program is great—I’m so happy that I’m on it. I love the people and the food. Lee (volunteer delivery driver) and his wife can come by anytime!”

Many older adults are unaware of the program, think it might be too expensive or that they would not qualify. To be eligible, a person must be age 60 or older, homebound and need assistance with some daily living activities. Meals can be delivered on a short-term basis if, for example, someone is recovering from hip surgery. Spouses of recipients can also receive meals. There is no cost associated with the program and while there is a suggested donation, it is not required.

To find if you are eligible and learn more, call 415-457-INFO (4636) or visit: https://www.marinhhs.org/nutrition-services-older-adults

Amy Dietz is a senior program coordinator for the AAA.
Slow and Steady: Tips for Reaching Lifestyle Goals in the New Year*
By Katherine Kielich, R.D.

Often, the new year brings with it thoughts of resolutions and sweeping changes to one’s lifestyle. While rooted with good intentions, more frequently than not, resolutions are not sustainable and many dietary and lifestyle changes do not make it much past Feb.

This year take it slow and keep it steady. Instead of a diet or physical activity overhaul, make small changes to what you eat and drink that will work for you now and in the future. Think small and realistic changes. You might not be ready to be physically active or eat another serving of vegetables every day, but perhaps this feels doable three days a week to start.

Remember that sometimes things do not go as planned, even with the best of intentions. If you miss one day or one milestone, do not give up! It can be helpful to think in advance - what might make your small changes easier or more challenging? Try to focus on what will help you be successful. If you feel you can work around the possible barriers, go for it! Otherwise, hold off for a while until you feel more confident.

Pick activities that you enjoy. If you focus on having fun or learning a new skill, you will be more likely to stick with it. It can also be helpful and motivating to think of an activity from your past; what was it about that activity that you enjoyed, how did it feel? You may recall the wind in your hair as you rode your bike down a hill or the thrill of swinging around while dancing. Recreating these feelings can help you find an activity you will want to continue doing over the longer term.

Find a friend with similar goals; swap healthy recipes and be active together. Staying on track is easier with support. Think of each change as a “win” as you build positive habits and find ways to reach your goals. Reward yourself - you have earned it!

*Adapted from www.choosemyplate.gov.

Katherine Kielich is a registered dietician with the AAA.

New Commissioner:
Lauren Vreeland Long: District 5

Lauren Vreeland Long is delighted to be joining the Marin Commission on Aging.

She initially pursued a career in dance, but later switched to physical therapy. She soon found that her passion lay with changing lives and restoring the independence of older adults though her work. She later went on to pursue a career in geriatrics.

“As a physical therapist of 30 years, 28 of them in Marin, I advocate for my clients. I work to educate, heal, strengthen, provide safety measures and connect older adults with resources to assist them to meet optimal outcomes.” She is dedicated to continuing to learn as long as she is living. Adding to her knowledge of physiology, she is interested in learning as much as possible about “elderhood,” looking at the multifactorial challenges of aging.

“Joining the Commission on Aging gives me the opportunity to give back to my community. Much of advocacy is communication and connection. I am particularly excited to see how we might promote inter-generational programs that can prevent isolation and loneliness.”

She and her husband Tim moved to Novato 27 years ago, where they raised two children and have always enjoyed the open spaces and hiking. In addition to owning a business and being a physical therapist, she volunteers for the Novato PTA and the Novato historical society, giving tours to third graders. Singing is another hobby; her Acapella group, Rita and the Cosmos, performs at assisted living facilities throughout Marin.

“Novato is a very special city, we feel blessed to be a part of it. Whenever we travel we always say, we’re so lucky to live in the best place in the world.”
Census 2020: Get Counted

By Stephanie McNally

The population of Marin County is aging rapidly, according to a report published last year by the Marin County Grand Jury. Currently, 28 percent of Marin residents are 60 or older and this percentage is projected to increase to 38 percent by 2030.

The 2020 Census will provide an accurate count of older adults to prepare government, nonprofits, healthcare and other service providers to forecast the needs of our aging population over the next 10 years. Adults 65 years and older are at risk of being undercounted in the 2020 Census.

The state of California estimates that for each person missed in the count, federal funding will be reduced by $1,000 per person per year. That is $10,000 per person over the next 10 years for a third of our county’s population. Accurate census data determines funding for programs such as Medi-Cal, Medicare Part B, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other programs that support our aging population. This data is also used to ensure we have enough housing, care facilities and healthcare workers over the next 10 years to address the growth in our aging communities.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, 95 percent of households will receive their census invitation in the mail. Every household will have the option of responding online, by mail or by phone. The first letter will be sent between March 12 - 20, 2020. The paper census form will arrive in the fourth mailing sent April 8 - 16, 2020.

For households that do not respond online, by mail or by phone by the end of April, the Census Bureau will follow-up in person. Census takers, also called enumerators, will be visiting residents who have not responded from May to July to assist in completing the census questionnaire.

Your responses to the 2020 Census are safe, secure and protected by federal law. Your answers can only be used to produce statistics and they cannot be used against you in any way. The Census Bureau takes strong precautions to keep online responses secure. All data submitted online are encrypted to protect personal privacy, and their cybersecurity program meets the highest and most recent standards for protecting personal information.

The 2020 Census is about equity, dignity and integrity. Civic engagement creates a space for everyone to be valued. The decennial census is the only civic engagement activity in our country that includes everyone. Please join our pledge campaign to stay informed, take part in the 2020 Census and share the importance of participation with family, friends and your community. To learn more, please visit our county census website: MarinCensus2020.org.

Stephanie McNally is the advocacy and policy manager at Canal Alliance.
LGBTQ+ Older Adults
By Dana Van Gorder

Demographic data are critical to decisions about what programs are needed and by whom, and how much funding should be allocated to them. But what if your particular slice of the population isn’t even counted? How do you build the services that are needed to assure health, well-being and social justice for your community? Some policy makers sought to avoid counting LGBTQ+ people precisely so that services did not flow to our community.

Having a thorough picture of an individual’s demographics and history also provides essential guidance about the medical or social services they might need. LGBTQ+ people, including older adults, have particular health and mental health issues and needs. While in recent years the civil rights and social position of LGBTQ+ people have improved dramatically, most LGBTQ+ older adults come from experiences of profound rejection and discrimination. LGBTQ+ older adults are more likely to live alone, to experience depression and isolation and to lack a meaningful social support network.

California law (AB 159) requires government agencies, including Marin County Aging and Adult Services, to ask questions about one’s sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). But here is the critical point - asking is necessary for the provider, answering by the client is not required. Clients should be made aware that their answers to SOGI questions will NOT affect whether they receive services, but may in fact strengthen those services.

Definitions

Lesbian:
A woman whose primary physical, romantic, and or/emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women.

Gay:
A word used to describe anyone, mainly men, who have primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to someone of the same sex, e.g., gay man, gay people.

Bisexual, Bi:
An individual who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women. “Bisexual” does not suggest having equal sexual experience with both men and women. In fact, some people who call themselves “bisexual” have not had any sexual experience at all.

Transgender:
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to transsexuals and cross-dressers. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). It is important to use the descriptive term (transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

GenderQueer/Gender Non-Binary
A person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both or a combination of male and female genders. This may manifest in use of gender neutral pronouns (they/them), gender expression (clothing, jewelry, etc.) or in other ways.

It is not always possible to make correct assumptions about the sexual orientation and gender identity of the people we meet. There is rarely harm done by asking in a caring way how someone identifies their gender.

The Spahr Center (www.thespahrcenter.org) is readily available to provide LGBTQ+ allyship training and technical assistance to all providers seeking it.
Fall Prevention Tips

By Beverly Winsor

This year, the Marin County Board of Supervisors (BOS) proclaimed Sept. 23-29 to be Fall Prevention Awareness Week.

As a Matter of Balance: Managing Your Concerns About Falls master trainer, I have had the opportunity to hear from more than 400 experts in the field of aging on falls and how to prevent them. Who are these experts? Marin County’s older adults.

During an eight-session course, participants of A Matter of Balance share what they know and learn new tips on how to reduce a fall in their future. Some key principles of fall prevention for the older adult are:

Fear of falling - People who have fallen often reduce their activity levels and may spend more time at home. This inactivity may actually increase the chance of falling and lead to social isolation and depression.

Exercise - It’s no surprise that the National Council on Aging, Centers for Disease Control and other health-related organizations list exercise as the most important way to lower your chance of falling. Lack of activity leads to weakness and weakness, especially in the lower body, can lead to a fall. Set a goal to be physically active for 150 minutes each week. This can be broken into 10-minute blocks. Include exercises that help to improve endurance, strength, balance and flexibility.

Keep your doctor informed – It is important to tell your doctor that you have fallen or are afraid of falling. Contact your medical professional while the facts are fresh in your mind. The doctor can look for problems causing changes in your body that can be treated to reduce your fall risk. The doctor will review your medications and may adjust those that are making you less steady on your feet.

Medications - Many older adults take multiple medications to treat health conditions. Some prescribed medicines and over-the-counter products cause side effects or interact with each other in ways that can lead to falls. People who take multiple medications have a greater risk of falling. It is very important to have your health care provider regularly review your prescribed medications and over-the-counter products. Understand the possible side effects and never add or stop taking medications without talking with your doctor first.

Check-ups - Have your blood pressure checked. If you have low blood pressure, standing up too quickly can cause dizziness and cause you to fall. Dehydration may contribute to low blood pressure; drink plenty of water. Annual vision and hearing checks are important – seeing potential hazards, as well as hearing what is around us, can help to prevent an accidental fall.

Check your feet - If your feet hurt, you will be less active – which could increase your risk of a fall. The soles of your feet have nerves that help you judge the position of your body.

Home safety - Falls can happen anywhere, but more than half of all falls happen at home. Many of these falls could be prevented by making simple changes in the home.

Ask for help - Often older adults hesitate to ask for help thinking that others will see them as dependent and no longer able to care for themselves. This hesitation to ask for help may place us in a potentially dangerous situation, i.e. climbing a ladder. As we age it is important to understand our own abilities and limitations. Let your friends and family members know how they can help so that you can keep your independence.

For information about A Matter of Balance classes in your community, contact me at (415)-99FALLS (415-993-2557) or email: Beverly.Winsor@mymarinhealth.org.

Beverly Winsor is A Matter of Balance master trainer.
**Aging Action Initiative**

*By Teri Dowling*

The Aging Action Initiative (AAI) was created to bring together the nonprofit, government and health care sectors to better address the needs of Marin’s increasing aging population. Today the AAI network includes more than 250 organizations. The purpose of AAI is to bring the lens of aging equity to every community issue, create new collaborations and build relationships for advocacy and education. The four priority areas that AAI is currently focusing on are: transportation, housing, health and economic security.

AAI does this by providing the following services:

- Inform & Connect: an annual academy of classes about resources for front line information assistance, resource referral and caregiver staff.

- Detect & Connect: a free workshop to help employees, volunteers and community members detect behaviors out of the ordinary, connect with the adult through compassionate communication and connect the person to appropriate resources. (The workshops are funded with an Mental Health Services Act grant from the Marin County Health & Human Services.)

- Providing a monthly newsletter that goes out to a mailing list of over 1,000 individuals and organizations in Marin.

- Organizing and offering an annual one-day convening in May that brings together organizations in Marin to address critical issues facing older adults.

- Creating a new and exciting emphasis for AAI called the Advocacy Alliance. This group is responsible for providing a unified voice and providing strong and consistent advocacy on issues that affect housing, health, economic security and health of older people living in Marin.

To learn more and get involved contact: Linda Jackson, linda.m.jackson@agingactioninitiative.org or 415-419-2599.

*Teri Dowling is a commissioner from the city of Ross.*

**California Senior Legislature (CSL)**

*By Allan Bortel*

In early Nov. 2019, the volunteer, nonpartisan “shadow” CSL held its 39th annual session at the state capitol in Sacramento. The main job of the CSL senior assembly members and senators is to propose legislation to improve the lives of California seniors and their families. Some areas of focus currently are on health care, safely “aging in place,” rules for senior residential care, seniors with low incomes and making public facilities more age friendly.

Marin’s elected representatives have two votes out of a potential 120. Interacting with individual members of the state legislature and their staff with proposals is a unique feature provided CSL members. These face-to-face meetings are in district offices, at the capitol and wherever appropriate. The formal proposals presented by CSL members are crafted into “legaleeze” with proper “whereas” and “wherefore” with the help of state attorneys who serve as Legislative Counsel to the official legislature. They give CSL members pointers and tweak proposals to fit into the state’s existing body of laws. Because seniors are an increasing demographic and have a high voter participation rate, the CSL is heard as a serious voice.

The CSL voted on 10 state proposals to be emphasized seeking the sponsorship of state legislators. In addition, the CSL voted on four federal proposals. Details can be found on the CSL website here: www.4CSL.org.

*Allan Bortel is the senior senator in the California Senior Legislature (CSL) from Marin County.*
King Street Senior Housing
By Kat Braeman

Creative planning and generous financing empowered Homeward Bound of Marin to convert and renovate a former convent into 12 units of senior housing. Emerging from homelessness, seven men and five women moved into the building on King Street, Larkspur, leased to Homeward Bound by St. Patrick’s Church in Dec. 2018. These individuals moved from a shelter to private rooms where happily “they can close the door, have some peace and quiet, and be independent,” according to Program Coordinator Micha Berman.

Many volunteers offer their expertise and resources, so residents have computer classes as well as yoga and a mindfulness group. Bob H., one of the first residents, is building a butterfly garden to attract monarch butterflies and has turned his space into an art studio. He and his wife had worked for 25 years as managers of a 36-unit building until the owner decided to terminate the staff, so without any notice they found themselves without a job or a home in 2017.

Generous funding came from the Marin County Board of Supervisors (BOS) the Marin Community Foundation, Tamalpais Pacific, the City of Larkspur and many individuals to finance the $1.2 million renovation. In 2018, the BOS approved a grant worth $200,000 to rehabilitate the property. The county funding for King Street Senior Housing came from the Housing Trust Fund established in 1980 to support housing for low-income and very-low-income households. The BOS also supported the King Street renovation with a $300,000 federal block grant from its HOME Investment Partnerships Program designed to expand the supply of affordable housing. The Homeward Bound project aligned with the Board’s 2018 goal to prioritize the Housing First Model for people experiencing homelessness.

Homeward Bound of Marin is the primary provider of shelters and services for homeless families and individuals. In 2019, it was recognized for Achievement in Nonprofit Excellence at the 26th annual Heart of Marin Awards presented by the Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership. Homeward Bound’s goal is "ending homelessness with training, housing and hope." One way it raises money and provide a fun community event is by hosting gourmet dinners with an inspiring chef. The Fresh Starts Chef Events feature celebrity chefs at these monthly dinners. Call 415-382-3363 or go to www.hbofm.org to find out more.

The Executive Director is Mary Kay Sweeney. A published poet, she has written about home and homelessness to probe some of the issues involved. Her poem, “Home Is….” is a reflection on what this powerful four-letter word means.

Kat Braeman worked as an administrative judge in Washington D.C. and now lives at Villa Marin.

Home Is . . .
By Mary Kay Sweeney

Home is more than a word, though words spoken with an open heart can feel like a living room, or just-baked bread—broken, buttered, and shared. Homes are built every day without brick and mortar, their foundations require no retrofit. Homes like these are people who allow their hearts to become easy chairs, people whose eyes and ears open doors to strangers, to visitors who may have lost their way. They create a welcome mat, often to the most unwelcomed, giving place, providing refuge from life’s harsher elements. Homes are built in the way a word is spoken, and homes are made in a mere glance, in the chance meeting with another who enters that sanctuary of welcome.
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boards/commission-aging

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