

## Easing financial insecurity among older adults

According to the [National Council on Aging](#), more than 25 million seniors age 60 and up are “financially insecure,” unable or at risk of not being able to afford the costs of housing, food, energy and transportation. Add rising medical costs to the mix, and the financial burden can be insurmountable.

Here in Vermont, 8.7% of the over-65 population – about 9,640 older adults – live in poverty, which in 2016 meant living on less than \$11,770 a year for a one-person household or \$15,930 for a household of two. (See [2018 Vermont Poverty Brief](#) issued by the [Vermont State Data Center](#).) Meanwhile, the [2018 Genworth Cost of Care Survey](#) pegs the annual median costs of care for older adults in Vermont as the 46th highest in the nation. Among the annual stats: \$61,776 for home health care, \$54,000 for assisted living, and \$113,698 for nursing-home care (shared room).

This speaks loudly and clearly to the value of the SASH partnership in helping people be healthy and living at home as they grow older.



## Area Agencies on Aging: a statewide financial safety net



Starting with the initial SASH assessment, and each year when participants meet one-on-one with their SASH coordinator to update their paperwork and healthy living plans, SASH coordinators learn whether a participant is in financial stress and connect them with appropriate resources if so. Typically the first step is contacting the local area agency on aging, which offers a wealth of programs and services for older Vermonters who are struggling financially.

For example, one of the five AAAs in Vermont, the [Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging](#) (SVCOA), runs a money-management program for clients in Rutland and Bennington counties -- and it serves older adults **statewide** through its “Organizational Representative Payee” (“Rep Payee” for short) program. It is the only AAA in Vermont authorized to serve as a Rep Payee.

The main role of the Rep Payee is to administer Social Security and other benefit payments for older Vermonters who, due to physical or mental difficulties, are unable to receive and manage these funds themselves, as confirmed by a medical provider. SVCOA works with each client (or their representative) to develop a monthly budget, conserving funds if possible for use in the event of an emergency. The program ensures that a client’s most basic and critical needs of food, shelter, clothing and medical care are met. Clients receive a personal allowance they can use to remain independent and in the community of their choosing.

SVCOA money-management program connects trained bill-payer volunteers with low-income clients in Bennington and Rutland counties who have trouble managing their finances. The volunteer and client first meet to create a budget, then each month the volunteer organizes the client’s bills, writes checks, helps with sending payments by mail (or online), and reconciles the client’s checkbook. All volunteers pass background checks and are fully insured. When working with clients who are not SASH participants, these volunteers are often the first to notice a decline in a client’s health or a change in their behavior.



## Help from Community Action Agencies

Another key financial resource for Vermonters of all ages are the state's five [Community Action Agencies \(CAAs\)](#), funded by the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity to provide fuel assistance in the winter, weatherization, farm-market coupons, assistance with 3Squares applications and more. All of these services help stretch the dollars of financially struggling SASH participants.



## SASH teams up with Medicare Patrol to tackle errors and fraud

SASH is a statewide program proven to improve health, reduce the need for emergency care and hospitalization, and delay or prevent transitions to nursing homes — all while saving Medicare dollars. It is this last part that makes us so excited to partner with the great [Senior Medicare Patrol \(SMP\)](#) team across the state. This partnership started last fall, and we hit the ground running! So far, SASH has:



- Trained one of our staff to serve as a point of contact for SASH staff to call with any concerns about Medicare errors, fraud or abuse. Our goal is to triage Medicare questions in house to ensure appropriate referrals to SMP.
- Hosted SMP's Anita Hoy and Joe Sherman on our monthly SASH coordinator training call to educate SASH staff statewide about SMP's services as well as issues around Medicare errors, fraud and abuse.
- Launched an education campaign for SASH participants. SMP is providing bulletin boards that with information about SMP and Medicare updates that will be installed at SASH sites. We are recruiting participants who will volunteer to regularly update these bulletin boards with information provided by SMP.
- Added information about SMP resources to our SASH intranet so staff can access information and podcasts with a single click.

### In addition to this effort with SMP...

We have received a separate grant that will enable us to work with SMP to present **workshops addressing financial vulnerabilities to participants at each SASH site**. We look forward to continuing these collaborative efforts to bring this information directly to all SASH participants.



Partners represented on SASH teams throughout Vermont include members and affiliates of these organizations:



A comprehensive list of all SASH partners can be found in the [SASH Partnership](#).

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