

# AGESPAN AND PARTNERS BRING HOUSING AND SERVICES TOGETHER



Housing and Services  
Resource Center

In northeastern Massachusetts, AgeSpan pursues solutions that bring together housing and supportive services. Why? Many older adults and people with disabilities not only need affordable and accessible housing, but also supportive services that enable them to be as independent as possible. Assistance with nutrition, transportation, personal care, medication management, and chore services are just a few examples of these critical services. Opportunities for social engagement are also vital to well-being. When housing and services are coordinated, older adults and people with disabilities are better able to live well in the community.

As an Area Agency on Aging (AAA), [AgeSpan](https://agespan.org/)<sup>1</sup> engages in innovative partnerships with housing providers through the Massachusetts Supportive Housing Program (MSHP). Working with property managers at designated local housing sites, AgeSpan places staff as resident service coordinators (RSCs). The RSCs deliberately build strong, trusting relationships with residents, offering a daily touchstone that greatly improves quality of life. As noted by Martha Leen, AgeSpan Director of Community Programs/ Area Agency Planner, “When RSCs came into housing sites, residents felt an improved sense of connectedness simply because someone in the building was regularly checking on them and making an effort to engage them.” This investment in developing trust enables RSCs to quickly identify and resolve issues according to each individual’s priorities.

Moreover, because the RSCs are highly trained AgeSpan employees, they know how to arrange and coordinate services, assist with enrollment in programs and public benefits,

and support many other aspects of residents’ well-being and independence. This robust model of service coordination, coupled with the AAA’s capabilities, brings essential services into housing for older adults and people with disabilities. Together, AgeSpan and its local housing partners utilize the MSHP to improve:

- Access to, and use of, both health care and home and community-based services,
- Housing stability,
- Food security,
- Social connectedness, and
- Community cohesion.

For the residents of these communities, the combination of housing and services helps them remain in their homes instead of potentially becoming homeless or needing to move into a nursing home.

<sup>1</sup> <https://agespan.org/>

## STATE PROGRAM CATALYZES LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR HOUSING AND SERVICES

Because housing and service systems often operate independently, state programs can catalyze community-driven efforts that coordinate housing and service providers. The Massachusetts Supportive Housing Program is led by both the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Department of Housing and Community Development. The program advances health equity by combining housing with services for two populations that have been historically underserved: older adults and people with disabilities who live in state-funded public housing.

In Massachusetts, the Aging Services Access Point network is comprised of nonprofit agencies, including AgeSpan, that provide direct and protective services to people age 60 and older. The MSHP funds a suite of services that includes on-site RSCs, 24/7 emergency response, group meals for residents who choose to join, and social activities. These services enable residents to maintain their independence, and the shared support creates a sense of community. The program works

because each Aging Service Access Point sustains close ties and dynamic partnerships with service providers in its designated region.

AgeSpan possesses a deep understanding of the needs of older adults and people with disabilities in its service area, which consists of 28 towns and cities. For decades—and like AAAs across America—AgeSpan has supported the health and independence of people they serve by creating and offering nutrition, transportation, housing preservation, home modification, home care, evidence-based health programs, and other services that help enable independent living. Some of these supports are provided directly by the AAA, and others come from AgeSpan’s network of service providers. Also, AgeSpan provides many evidence-based programs to help adults of all ages manage diabetes and other chronic health conditions, prevent falls, stay physically active, deal with depression, and more. When unmet needs are identified in its service area, AgeSpan works with stakeholders to develop and implement solutions.

## RESIDENT SERVICE COORDINATORS AND TRUST

To improve how AgeSpan reaches low-income community members, the agency is developing a broad array of housing partnerships. Overviews of two of these partnerships can be found in *“Innovative Partnerships that Provide Support to Live at Home”* (on the next page). In addition, AgeSpan became a MSHP partner and now works onsite with residents of eight state-funded public housing communities for older

adults and adults of all ages with disabilities. To improve housing stability, a goal of the MSHP, AgeSpan leverages its AAA service network to provide home and community-based services based on a comprehensive assessment of each individual’s needs and choices. Improved well-being, another MSHP goal, is also enhanced by building relationships.

“AgeSpan staffs on-site RSCs who are a keystone of program success,” said Leen. Residents are more likely to access supports and services and engage in programming when they are encouraged to do so by a trusted person. RSCs cultivate that trust by

building rapport as they see residents daily. When RSCs notice a resident’s condition has changed, they are able to quickly respond by tapping into AgeSpan’s direct services, its network of community partners, and its systems.

## **INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT TO LIVE AT HOME**

AgeSpan has established and nurtures additional partnerships that serve the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. Among others, these collaborations address housing stability and wellness.

### **Partnerships with Accountable Care Organizations stabilize housing situations.**

Housing stability plays a key role in health and well-being. AgeSpan and the Northeast Independent Living Program (a Center for Independent Living) teamed up to lead a network of community-based organizations that is contracting with Medicaid Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) to offer housing-related services, such as pre-tenancy support, tenancy preservation, and home modifications. To learn more, read *Partnership Profile: Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley and North Shore and My Care Family Accountable Care Organization*<sup>2</sup> from USAging’s Aging and Disability Business Institute.

### **An onsite wellness nurse prevents emergency room visits and ambulance calls.**

AgeSpan collaborates with Winn Managed Properties, which receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, to provide supportive services to residents of the Alice G. Winn & Family Heritage House. At this community for older adults, AgeSpan’s on-site wellness nurse is available to residents by appointment or drop-in for at-home services, health and prescription consultation, and more. AgeSpan also provides a resident service coordinator focused on engaging programming, education, and care coordination for residents. In the program’s first year, all 111 Heritage House residents received services, at least 14 emergency room visits were avoided, and 42 percent of residents participated in at least one of the evidence-based programs offered to help them stay healthy and engaged.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aginganddisabilitybusinessinstitute.org/elder-services-of-the-merrimack-valley-and-north-shore-and-my-care-family-accountable-care-organization/>

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: PERSON-CENTERED SUPPORT AND CONSUMER CHOICE

In partnership with the property managers, AgeSpan provides both individualized and group services in these independent living settings, chiefly by using funding from the MSHP and the Older Americans Act. AgeSpan uses a person-centered approach—meaning they focus on supporting residents’ independence and ability to make their own choices. As AgeSpan employees, RSCs can readily provide an extensive array of support tailored to each individual and routinely perform the following services in keeping with residents’ choices by providing:

- Person-centered assessments of individual residents’ health and social needs and the development of individual plans based on their priorities and goals.
- Direct connections and referrals to community agencies that provide needed health care and home and community-based services. These might range from home care to veterans’ services, to transportation, and many others. RSCs also monitor service use and support communications with service providers.
- Enrollment assistance for benefits such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as well as difficult-to-access services such as behavioral health assistance and dental insurance.
- Education to residents about options such as [Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly](#)<sup>3</sup> (PACE, a program that provides participants with comprehensive medical and social services) and [Senior Care Options](#)<sup>4</sup> (a health plan that provides a combination of health services and social support services). RSCs also offer assistance with enrolling and follow up to assure fit and coordinate with PACE case managers for residents enrolled in the program.
- Support to residents with Money Follows the Person, a federal Medicaid program that supports access to home and community-based services for individuals who have returned to the community after leaving institutions such as nursing homes.
- Easy access to State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) counselors, who can help with understanding Medicare options.
- Assistance with finding jobs, transportation, clothing, household goods, durable medical equipment, and other necessities.
- Individualized counseling and case management for residents who need more intensive assistance with accessing and coordinating supports.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare-Medicaid-Coordination/Medicare-and-Medicaid-Coordination/Medicare-Medicaid-Coordination-Office/PACE/PACE>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/senior-care-options-sco-overview>

Other services promote housing stability and tenancy preservation. RSCs, as a trusted resource, can mediate conflicts residents may have with other residents, the landlord, or housing authority staff. In cases of hoarding, RSCs initiate team meetings of case managers, providers, and housing authority staff to identify supports and services to preserve tenancy. All discussions are confidential and centered in consumer choice and control. For example, RSCs support residents when concerned family members believe they can no longer live independently and pressure the resident to move to a more restrictive setting. RSCs also advocate with housing authority staff on residents' behalf. During changes in residency, the RSC assists with move-ins and move-outs.

To ensure social engagement and community-building programming aligned with residents' preferences, AgeSpan conducts an annual resident survey to inform community programming. Some popular social activities are community coffee hours, movie screenings, speakers, fantasy football, trivia contests, and hands-on activities such as gardening and woodworking. When residents requested fresh fruits and vegetables, AgeSpan recruited

a local farmer to provide in-season farmers' markets at the housing sites, allowing residents to choose their own foods. To address food insecurity, residents also have the opportunity to obtain bags of groceries with shelf-stable and fresh items from an AgeSpan partnership with the Greater Boston Food Bank. To meet the MSHP requirement that sites ensure that all residents have access to at least one meal per day, AgeSpan uses Older Americans Act funding to provide one group meal per day that is available to all residents.

AgeSpan engages in health-related activities such as providing vaccines and conducting blood pressure checks. The AgeSpan Healthy Living Center of Excellence brings on-site evidence-based workshops such as A Matter of Balance for falls prevention and Healthy Ideas to reduce depression. By offering these programs, AgeSpan helps reduce emergency room visits and the need for more intensive care while also giving residents ways to make additional interpersonal connections. AgeSpan also provides a 24/7 response service with its MSHP resources.

### **WHAT ARE HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES?**

These are health and social services provided in someone's home or community rather than in institutions such as hospitals or nursing homes. These services support the everyday activities of older adults and people with disabilities, and help them live independently in their own homes. Examples include personal care assistance, homemaker services, case management, caregiver training, home health, and more.

## HOW THE PARTNERSHIP WORKS

Maintaining a successful partnership requires the housing authority and AgeSpan to work together on behalf of the residents. Before initiating services at a housing site, the two partners create a memorandum of understanding that specifies the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

In general, the housing authority provides the facility, and AgeSpan provides the support. In most cases, the housing authority is responsible for a no-cost on-site office space; property maintenance, safety features, and 24-hour access; kitchen, cooking, and dining

facilities for group meals; and coordination with the RSC on how best to meet residents' needs. In addition to providing the RSC and group services, AgeSpan arranges for a home care services provider that also ensures 24/7 emergency assistance to residents.

Partners hold regular meetings to coordinate on communication with residents and changes in group programming that may have implications for building maintenance. These meetings also foster coordination of solutions for problems affecting residents' well-being, such as excessive clutter or noise issues.

## OUTCOMES

Together, AgeSpan and its housing partners improved housing stability directly and through the following accomplishments that are described below.

- **Tenancy support:** The partnership preserved tenancy for residents who may have been at risk of eviction or institutionalization and created a conflict-resolution process to resolve conflicts between housing authorities and residents and between residents.
- **Increased access to needed services and resources:** Once residents gained access to AgeSpan's programs and services, referrals to its community partners increased. Accordingly, residents

have benefited from caregiver support programs, transportation, behavioral health services, assistive technology, Medicare counseling and assistance, and more. Residents also received encouragement and support, as needed, to enroll in the SNAP and other public benefit programs.

- **Increased engagement in health and wellness:** Residents participated in on-site health and wellness programs, including evidenced-based programming through the AgeSpan Healthy Living Center of Excellence. These programs empowered participants to manage their health and avoiding falls.

- **Improved food security:** Communal and brown-bag meals alleviated hunger.
- **Reduced social isolation:** Residents had better access to community resources—such as senior centers, public libraries, and faith-based institutions—and interactions with their staff or volunteers.
- **Increased community cohesion:** Through this shared experience, residents established bonds with RSCs and developed stronger relationships with one another. As a result, they had a secure sense of well-being.

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### **HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES PARTNERSHIPS IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE**

The outcomes from the AgeSpan partnership with the MSHP and housing sites show the potential of combining housing with supportive services, delivered with a personal touch. Through strong, trusting relationships with residents, RSCs readily assess residents' needs, priorities, and goals. As AgeSpan Area Agency on Aging staff, the RSCs have an array of supportive services at their fingertips for individuals to promote independence and to

enrich residents' access to social engagement, opportunities brought in from partners from across the greater community, health and wellness programs, and a caring environment.

By forming a community-driven approach to bring services into affordable housing, partners can enhance housing stability and optimize independence, well-being, and health of older adults and people with disabilities across the lifespan.

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