



Bristol Elder Services, Inc.  
Area Plan  
2022 – 2025

DRAFT

Bristol Elder Services  
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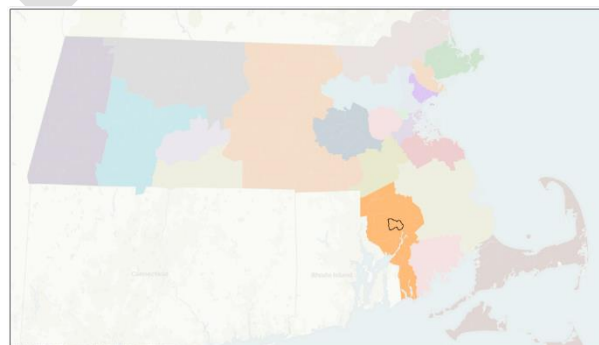
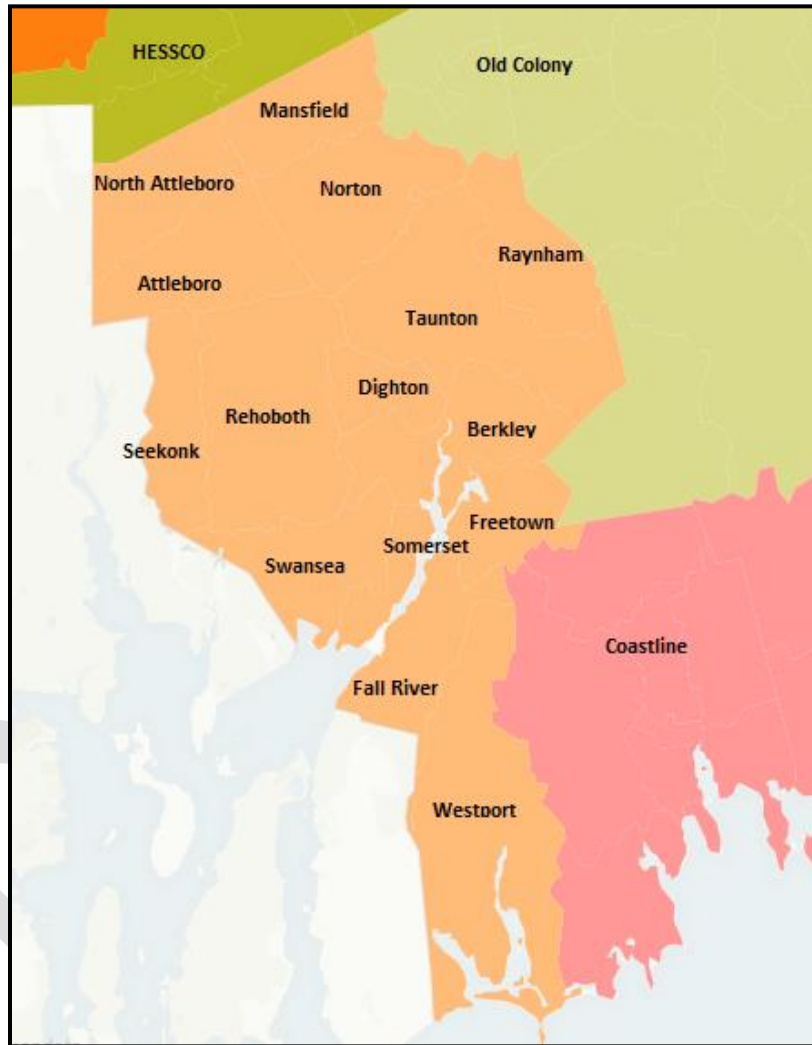
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## **Executive Summary**

Founded in 1973, Bristol Elder Services, Inc. (Bristol) is a not-for-profit organization funded in part through contracts with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (Elder Affairs). Bristol is dedicated to being the leader in improving the quality of life for older adults, people with disabilities, and their families and caregivers. As the focal point for innovative action, Bristol provides and advocates for community-based services that promote independence and dignity. The agency makes it possible for older adults and their families to access a comprehensive system of health and supportive services. Working with older adults, people with disabilities, their caregivers, and professionals, Bristol makes a difference in the lives of elders and disabled individuals in 15 greater Attleboro, Fall River, and Taunton communities, i.e., Attleboro, Berkley, Dighton, Fall River, Freetown, Mansfield, North Attleboro, Norton, Raynham, Rehoboth, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea, Taunton, and Westport. In addition to its work in the 15 community Planning and Service area (PSA), Bristol investigates reports of abuse and provides protective services to elders residing in Acushnet, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Gosnold, Marion, Mattapoisett, New Bedford, and Rochester. Bristol is an open and affirming organization.

The agency's philosophy emphasizes achieving its mission, goals, and objectives through partnerships and collaborations with public and private organizations within its PSA, as well as with regional and state-wide organizations to bring elder issues to the forefront. Bristol has a history of working closely with Elder Affairs to ensure the implementation and continuation of programs, services, and supports vital to senior independence. Bristol retains membership in local initiatives that resolve issues of importance to older adults. Membership in trade association task forces maximizes the role that Aging Services Access Points (ASAP) play in opportunities presented in new models of care. Bristol has achieved a solid working relationship with both the local legislative and federal congressional delegations.

Bristol serves as both the ASAP and the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for the PSA. As a AAA, Bristol advocates for older adults in the community, and as such, monitors policies, hearings, and programs that affect seniors. The agency works to develop a coordinated and cost-effective system of care in the community with an emphasis on program efficiencies and effectiveness. AAAs like Bristol are charged with serving all elders, with a special emphasis on those with greatest economic need, greatest social need, and at risk for institutional placement, as well as low-income minority older individuals, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), LGBTQ+ older adults, and individuals residing in rural areas.

## **Context**

The agency conducts a Needs Assessment study every four years to identify the areas of priority gaps in services and supports locally in preparation for the development of an Area Plan. The Area Plan summarizes Bristol's strategy to address needs identified nationally by the Administration on Community Living (ACL): strengthen and expand core programs, participant-directed/person-centered planning, and elder justice. In addition, the Area Plan addresses locally identified needs of housing, transportation, inclusion, community supports/health services/communication, and outdoor spaces and buildings. The developed

strategy will direct Bristol for the next four years throughout the PSA and will expand and evolve as required.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2010, the population in Bristol's PSA of 369,893 residents, 72,260, or 19.5%, are over the age of 60. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the July 1, 2019 population in the PSA to be 383,858, with approximately 21.9%, 84,065, being over the age of 60. Per the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile (Profile), of the 2018 estimated population in Bristol's PSA, 86% of residents over the age of 65 speak only English at home. The 2018 Profile also reports that 2.6% of the population that are over 60 years of age in the local County, which is part of Bristol's PSA, are LGBTQ+. Based on data from the 2018 Profile, 6.65% of residents over 65 years of age in Bristol's PSA had income levels below the poverty line during the year 2017. Approximately 13,500 residents over 65 years of age, and living in Bristol's PSA, live alone.

Although there is a small indigenous population in the Bristol PSA, the CPO has initiated contact with a local tribe and will work to determine unmet needs and partnership opportunities.

Bristol's multi-pronged Needs Assessment completed during the period of September 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020 aligned with the statewide Needs Assessment indicating that a great percentage of elders are concerned with housing, transportation, and social isolation. Many community partners assisted in the survey effort. Bristol's AAA Needs Assessment was conducted simultaneously with the one it led for the Greater Fall River Age Friendly effort.

The survey instrument was developed by AARP and was conducted via hard copy and online. The survey was available in the primary languages within the PSA, that is Portuguese, Spanish, and English. (Attachment 1)

More than 1,100 copies were disseminated through:

- Kick-off event: A press conference hosted by Fall River Mayor Paul Coogan.
- Mail: To a random sample of individuals identified from community census lists.
- Social media and hard copies: The 35+ members of the Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition (Attachment 2).
  - AARP posted it on their website
  - Fall River Government Center and SER Jobs made copies available in their lobbies
- Stakeholders: Councils on Aging (COA), Advisory Council and Board members completed the survey and were asked to publicize it via newsletters and postings.
- Community events: Berkley COA's special event and Registry of Motor Vehicles Senior Days in Fall River were distribution sites.
- Publicity: Press coverage in the local newspaper and the CEO's appearance on several WSAR talk radio programs.

Although COVID-19 restrictions presented challenges to conducting focus groups, Bristol was able to host one via a Zoom platform for Fall River Housing Authority residents and employees; at an Advisory Council meeting; and at a meeting of an area service club. The three focus groups consisted of the general public, a State Representative, COA Directors and appointee; participants that live in or work for the Fall River Housing Authority; and participants that live in and work in the Fall River area. The focus group planned for the greater Attleboro area resulted

in no one registering, despite its being advertised as a virtual event. Each group provided input in identifying and addressing the challenges and needs in the PSA.

The focus group consisting of the six members of the Advisory Council identified the top three needs of:

1. Housing: including the lack of affordable rents and the increased costs of being able to stay in the home, such as taxes and home modifications/repairs; long waits for housing; lack of senior housing, housing with supports; and need for tax work off programs.
2. Transportation: lack of transportation in more rural towns; transportation for special services, such as veteran services and out of area hospitals; need for more affordable transportation to medical appointments and grocery stores.
3. Financial Assistance: increased SNAP benefits; lower financial guidelines for public benefits and for services, such as assistance with home repairs.

The focus group consisting of the five participants that live in or work for the Fall River Housing Authority and participate in their tenants' association identified the top three needs of:

1. Community safety in neighborhoods: need for more police presence in the neighborhoods and more security cameras.
2. Accessibility of food programs in certain areas: programs are not available in all areas and transportation can be a problem; home delivered meals availability in more buildings; and transportation to food pantries.
3. Socialization: noted a loss of general feeling of "community" and knowing one's neighbors.

The focus group consisting of the six participants that live in and work in the Fall River area identified with the following top three needs:

1. Caregiver/widow support: including more mental health services; screenings for dementia; increased need for services and socialization when a spouse dies.
2. Socialization: including opportunities that allow for the homebound or those with limited mobility to get out of their homes; free or low-cost transportation to events.
3. Staying active: including the need for bike trails, transportation to parks and social events; increasing knowledge of certain services.

Additionally, Bristol compared the results of its survey with others conducted within the PSA, i.e., Aging in the City of Attleboro: A Community Needs Assessment,<sup>1</sup> and Community Health Needs Assessment<sup>2</sup>. Bristol's survey data was also congruent with the top needs, social isolation, transportation, and housing, reported by the Needs Assessments conducted by 21 AAAs across the state. Other top priorities that aligned with the statewide assessment results

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<sup>1</sup> Coyle, Caitlin and Mary Krebs, "Aging in the City of Attleboro" (June, 2020). Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging Publications.

<sup>2</sup> HealthFirst Family Care Center and Family Healthcare Center Stanley Street Treatment & Resources, "Community Health Needs Assessment" (2019).

included health care, concerns around economic and financial security, and outdoor spaces in the Bristol PSA.

Bristol's results focused on similar areas noted in other regional surveys:

1. Housing: 93.47% of respondents felt that it is extremely or very important to be able to live independently in their own home as they age. Some of the many barriers to achieving that goal include affordability, home repair, and services/supports required to remain independent.
2. Transportation: A top need cited was transportation to medical appointments and includes affordability, accessibility, and availability. 43.39% rated accessible public transportation as poor or fair, and only 43.57% rated it as affordable.
3. Inclusion: This identified need includes removing social isolation, increasing assistance to caregivers, and adapting employment/volunteer opportunities for older adults.
  - 64.8% of respondents identified themselves as current unpaid caregivers of a family member or anticipated being one in the future.
  - 38.41% of survey respondents stated that a disability, handicap, or chronic disease prevents them or their spouse/partner from participating fully in work, school, or other activities, and 30.1% want better opportunities for social interactions.
  - Approximately 60% rated fair or poor the ability for older adults and those with disabilities to find appropriate employment.
4. Community supports/health services/communication: This broad need identified livability concerns within the respective communities. Although local hospitals and medical providers received high ratings, respondents cited concerns about the workforce shortage, economic insecurity, and lack of one central place to find information about all community resources. People also spoke about the high incidence of chronic diseases and behavioral health and substance abuse issues in the PSA.
  - Survey questions about community supports/health services revealed that 82.18% of respondents believe that their community has excellent, very good, or good, well-maintained hospitals and health care facilities. However, those who responded cited several areas that pose barriers to having a healthy community. Issues included:
    - Lack of available, affordable medical transportation
    - High incidence of chronic conditions
    - Low incidence of healthy lifestyle indicators
    - Need for a workforce available to provide in-home, community-based services
    - Addressing behavioral health concerns.
  - More than 83% of survey participants noted that if they were seeking information about resources, they would turn to informal supports rather than the local organizations that provide that information.
5. Outdoor spaces/buildings: The responses included the need for well-maintained and well-lit streets and sidewalks. People noted that having parks and benches adds to making the community one in which residents want to live and age.

## **Goals Objectives and Strategies**

### **Goal: Strengthen and Expand Core Programs**

The Older American's Act (OAA), enacted by Congress in 1965, created the Administration of Aging (AOA), now known as Administration for Community Living (ACL), that addresses the need for services for older adults. Funding made available through the OAA, contracts, and other grants allows Bristol to provide community services that align with Elder Affairs' values that include growing older, having a choice to live in the community, valuing the contributions of older adults and those with disabilities, and a having a person-centered approach that promotes dignity while also taking into account cultural identities. Bristol provides services to meet these values while collaborating with partner organizations and other stakeholders. The agency continues to advocate at the local, state, and federal levels on key issues that impact the overall health and well-being of elders and address the service gaps revealed by the Needs Assessment.

- I. Title III-B** – Title III-B Supportive Services are person-centered in focus and designed to encourage and assist older adults to use facilities and services available to them and include but are not limited to:
- In-home services, e.g., personal care, chore, and homemaker assistance
  - Access services, e.g., transportation, case management, and information and referral
  - Community services, e.g., legal services, mental health services, and adult day care

### **In-Home Services**

Bristol administers the State Home Care program within the PSA. This program includes a broad range of services that can support independence and wellbeing. Services include, but are not limited to personal care, housework, meal preparation, grocery shopping, laundry, and home health services. Other options include day care programs, transportation assistance, and overnight respite care in a nursing facility. Bristol uses an interdisciplinary team approach to assess and create an effective care plan for each consumer. The consumer, in coordination with informal and formal supports, is at the center of and directs the care plan.

Bristol provides Geriatric Support Services Coordinators (GSSC) for six Senior Care Options (SCO) programs. Bristol contracts with six SCOs, i.e., Senior Whole Health (1,923 members), Fallon/Navicare (247 members), United Health Care (536 members), Tufts Health Plan (273 members), Commonwealth Care Alliance (51 members), and Boston Medical Center Healthnet Plan (58 members). The SCO program covers all services reimbursable under Medicare and MassHealth through a senior care organization and its network of providers. The program offers MassHealth Standard members age 65 or older quality care that combines health services with social support services. A team of professionals, including a member's primary care physician, nurse, and a Bristol GSSC, works with older adults and their families to develop their plan of care, which combines health and community-based services.



The Needs Assessment revealed that more than 93% of those surveyed reported that it is important to remain in their own home and community as they age. Some of the barriers reported were the high cost of home maintenance such as repairs, taxes, and accessibility. There is also a lack of affordable housing options. The agency has reached out to Old Colony Habitat for Humanity, which serves most of Bristol's PSA, regarding their "Brush with Kindness" program. This program helps low to moderate-income homeowners with smaller home repairs. Bristol will share this eligibility information with COAs, and callers as needed. Bristol's CPO also participates on the Greater Bristol County Attleboro Taunton Coalition to End Homelessness (GBCATCH), the Continuum of Care for the region, that will enhance the efforts to address affordable housing.

Bristol's Supportive Housing Program offers low-income elders the opportunity to remain in the community independently while aging in place. Residents have access to an on-site Bristol service coordinator, group meals and emergency services. Bristol currently has two supportive housing sites, one in Taunton and one in Fall River, and plans to expand to the Attleboro area. As the COVID-19 restrictions are lifting, Bristol is now re-establishing its presence in supportive housing buildings and reviewing other supportive housing models to determine best practices.

Future goals: Bristol will

- Collaborate with local realtors and rental property management companies to match older adults with apartment vacancies in the private sector.
- Work with or provide a housing specialist to gather resources and connect to the community in search of affordable housing opportunities.
- Research tax write off programs in the PSA and advocate with partner organizations for such programs where appropriate.
- Investigate the feasibility of partnering with Habitat for Humanity and local vocational high schools for home repairs and accessibility.
- Continue its grant to the South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Inc. to assist with fighting evictions due to the federal and state eviction moratoriums ending.
- Resume its activity within the Fall River Homeless Coalition.

#### **Access services**

- *Transportation*

Survey questions about Community Support/Health Services revealed that 82.18% of respondents believe that their community has excellent, very good, or good, well-maintained hospitals and health care facilities. However, the lack of affordable medical transportation is seen as a barrier, both in the cities and towns. Bristol currently provides a grant to the Community Access to Rides (CAR) program to supplement transportation when public options are not available or appropriate in the greater Attleboro area. The subgrant relationship will continue with the hope of the project's becoming self-sustaining.

Findings also indicate that 39.8% of survey respondents rated sidewalks as fair or poor, and 56.7% rated streets and intersections as fair or poor. The Advisory Council will share ideas and

resources regarding mobility/transportation issues and will advocate or work with other organizations to make improvements. Findings from the Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition Survey resulted in that group's plan to foster a collaboration among transportation providers, provide education about available transportation, and conduct advocacy on transportation issues.

With a grant from Lyft, Bristol provided rides to COVID vaccination sites throughout the region. It is anticipated that this established partnership will expand in the future to address other identified transportation needs.

The Town of Dighton received \$118,000 via a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to install new, clearly delineated crosswalks, curb cuts, and wheelchair-accessible sidewalks to make the community more accessible to residents with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Bristol's Needs Assessments revealed that outdoor spaces and safe crosswalks were a concern. In Bristol's PSA it was noted that 39.8 % of the sidewalks were rated in fair or poor condition; 57% rated intersections as fair or poor; and 63.3 % of the streets were also rated fair or poor. An independent study ranked Fall River as sixth in the Commonwealth's communities with the highest number of older pedestrian crashes. Mass Motion has representation on the Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition and is a member of that group's task force discussing infrastructure concerns and pedestrian safety. Bristol's work over the next four years will include collaborating with the governing bodies within the cities and towns to identify and address this area of concern and undertake projects similar to those in Dighton and Fall River.

- *Information and Referral*

Communication and information dissemination are cited as areas of concern in Bristol's Needs Assessment. More than 83% of survey participants noted that if they were seeking information about resources they would turn to informal supports. Bristol's goals include:

- Providing access to information that is available in one place.
- Promoting information about available services and supports.
- Having information available in multiple languages.

Bristol's Information and Referral (I&R) Department answered 8,153 inquiries in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020. I&R staff maintain resource directories and information regarding monthly offerings at the COAs and other community organizations. This information is shared with callers as appropriate, but also with staff for use with clients and family members. Additionally, lists are developed for one-time events, such as holiday dinners for low-income and socially isolated individuals, and for emerging needs, such as COVID-19 resources. The I&R unit will continue to determine areas of need and research and disseminate resources accordingly.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.tauntongazette.com/story/news/local/2021/07/28/dighton-americans-with-disabilities-curb-cuts-ramps-crosswalks-safe-streets/5390244001/?for-guid=44d38e24-cf30-4790-b30b-d5d7cee40f71&utm\\_source=tauntongazette-Daily%20Briefing&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=daily\\_briefing\\_greeting&utm\\_term=list\\_article\\_thumb&utm\\_content=MASSACHUSETTS-TAUNTON-NLETTER65](https://www.tauntongazette.com/story/news/local/2021/07/28/dighton-americans-with-disabilities-curb-cuts-ramps-crosswalks-safe-streets/5390244001/?for-guid=44d38e24-cf30-4790-b30b-d5d7cee40f71&utm_source=tauntongazette-Daily%20Briefing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily_briefing_greeting&utm_term=list_article_thumb&utm_content=MASSACHUSETTS-TAUNTON-NLETTER65)

Bristol is a member of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), and the agency will continue to ensure that at least one I&R staff member is AIRS-certified. I&R staff are experienced at listening to callers and asking probing, follow-up questions to determine the best resources for each person. Callers are directed to both in-house programs and local, regional, and national services. Those who require assistance in following through may be connected directly to the referred organization or receive a follow-up call to verify they received the assistance requested.

Bristol plans to hire additional personnel to further develop a robust I&R team. This employee will begin with outreach to consumers to inquire about the need for assistance with vaccination education, setting up appointments, and, as needed, assistance with transportation. Bristol partners with the Fall River Fire Department to arrange in-home COVID-19 vaccinations for the City's 60+ and disabled populations.

For callers who are trying to determine long-term housing and supports, Options Counseling is available. The counselor provides information about housing options, financial resources to help pay for services, help evaluating choices, and assistance connecting with appropriate referrals. The program enables individuals in need of long-term services and supports to understand the alternatives and their limitations, thus allowing the person to make the most informed decision to best meet their needs.

Providing information in response to the identified need of addressing financial insecurity is part of Bristol's work. All Bristol direct service staff promote public benefits to callers and clients. It is Bristol's practice that all appropriate staff receive education and training regarding eligibility and the application process for SNAP and other public benefits. Individuals are screened for program eligibility at intake and on an ongoing basis. Clients/families are advised whenever a client may qualify for a benefit. Staff assist in the application process when warranted.

Bristol partners with community organizations to bring expertise to staff, older adults, disabled individuals, and families. The MassHealth Enrollment Center (MEC) has dedicated personnel that Bristol staff can access to facilitate applications and resolve issues. Post COVID-19 pandemic, Bristol expects that the MEC and the Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone (SHINE) programs will again be able to conduct office hours in Bristol's office to increase accessibility to staff and consumers.

Outreach is an important component of educating the community regarding available services. Bristol will continue to make staff available to present to older adults, caregivers, and professionals. This includes presence at senior resource fairs, neighborhood associations, church groups, radio and cable appearances, and through staff meetings. Presentations include a list of frequently requested topics or are tailored to the group's requests. Bristol's website is accessible and can be translated into any of 24 languages. Investment in upgrading the website is a goal. Inquiries by e-mail have increased to 5.5% of the I&R contacts made.

Bristol regularly participates in local cable and radio shows such as *Family Focus*, *C U Wednesday*, and *View from the Hill*. Different programs allow Bristol to reach a wider audience and discuss a variety of topics, including mental health in older adults, available programs and services, and current legislative topics. The local television cable station has begun interviewing Bristol management to promote the agency and its mission. Bristol anticipates that the partnership will develop into the agency's ability to film series of educational events, such as a Nutrition cooking series and evidence-based program sessions. Bristol also submits public service announcements to newspapers, radio, and cable stations throughout the PSA. Bristol will develop a newsletter to announce updates, resources, and other offerings. Dissemination will be through a newly-acquired subscription to MailChimp, an e-mail marketing program.

Bristol participates and has leadership roles in several area coalitions. This allows staff to maintain an awareness of community programs and benefits and ensures that older adult issues, such as barriers to services and strategies for access, are at the forefront of discussions. Coalitions address issues including domestic violence, homelessness/housing, and benefits.

Bristol also recognizes the value to partnering with the private business community and has representation on the Rotary Club of Fall River and One SouthCoast Chamber of Commerce. These relationships provide networking opportunities, heightening awareness of Bristol and enhancing the agency's public profile. Educational information and events are shared through the Chamber's weekly newsletter reaching over 1,000 member businesses.

- *Community Services/Supports*

Community Health Network Areas (CHNA) bring together hospitals, health centers, service agencies, schools, businesses, and other concerned citizens to identify the health needs of the local communities, find ways to address those needs, and improve the community's health. Bristol partners with both CHNA 24 in the greater Attleboro/Taunton areas and CHNA 25 in the greater Fall River area. These groups address issues such as improved access to healthy eating, falls prevention, and advocacy for reducing exposure to second hand smoke.

Bristol convenes the Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition to improve the quality of life in the region for those with Alzheimer's Disease or other dementias and their care partners. The group works with employers to provide training that helps employees recognize customers with dementia and how to interact with them successfully. The Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition continues to expand the types of businesses it reaches including banks, insurance companies, realtors, attorneys, human service agencies, and government departments. The group will partner with area churches and neighborhood associations.

One example of the work is the Purple Table Reservation program. Bristol trains local restaurants to provide an environment for those living with dementia or other physical or cognitive conditions who can benefit from a more predictable environment and additional accommodations when dining out. One of the certified restaurants is Room Two Fifty-One, operated by the students at the local vocational high school. This highlights how the entire

community can be a part of the Age/Dementia Friendly movement. Private donations help to market the Purple Table initiative by offering gift cards to families who can benefit.

The Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition utilized a United Way of Greater Fall River grant to enhance the project by adding a three-tier behavioral health component, comprised of a multi-media behavioral health anti-stigma campaign on ten topics, a virtual conference for social service professionals and caregivers to address “caring for yourself and others during times of uncertainty,” and an online training on the topic of mental health and aging. The successful conference has been reformatted as a cable television presentation that has been distributed throughout the region to other networks. The work will continue.

Bristol uses a Request for Proposals process to underwrite programs and services in the PSA to alleviate core and identified needs. In FFY 2021 Bristol awarded Title III-B grant funding to South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS) to address specific legal needs; Health Care Options to provide access to dental screenings and referrals; Community Counseling of Bristol County (CCBC) to provide in-home mental health assessments for elders in crisis; Old Colony YMCA to provide farm fresh produce to low-income housing residents; and CAR to supplement public transportation with free ride-share company rides. The RFPs for FFY 2022 and 2023 prioritized programs that address the latest Needs Assessment findings including housing; transportation; civic engagement/employment, community support, health services, information dissemination; legal assistance; and outdoor spaces/buildings.

Title III-B grant funding for FFY 2022 and 2023 has been awarded to SCCLS to address legal needs; CCBC to provide in-home mental health assessments for elders in crisis; Buzzards Bay Speech Therapy to provide virtual and in-home cognitive wellness programs to improve cognition and increase communication and socialization; CAR to supplement public transportation with free ride-share company rides; Community Visiting Nurse Agency to provide access to dental screening and referrals; Family Service Association to provide LGBTQ+ elders’ support, treatment and training to Bristol staff, consumers, caregivers and agencies in the Bristol PSA that serve older adults; HealthFirst Family Care Center to provide equipment for interpreter service and community initiatives; People Incorporated to support a Memory Café for disabled older adults who experience memory changes due to Alzheimer’s Disease and all other forms of mild cognitive impairment; and Norton Senior Center/COA to provide a building where seniors can attend activities and receive resources and support in the community to remain independent.

## **II. Long Term Care Ombudsman**

The Long Term Care Ombudsman program is one of Bristol’s core services. The program’s goals are to improve residents’ quality of care, life, and environment. Volunteers advocate for residents to ensure that their concerns are being addressed. Due to regular admissions and staff turnover, ongoing education is important. Program staff and volunteers consistently make information available and outreach to individuals and families at each long-term care facility. Bristol staff are also educated regarding the program so that appropriate referrals may be maximized. Volunteers are recruited continually through postings on local volunteer websites. Bristol partners with other AAAs and coordinates with Elder Affairs to train all volunteers. Bristol will reward ombudsmen through stipend, one-time payouts, or transition to paid status.

Staff will collaborate with state agencies when facilities are in jeopardy or closing

### **III. Title III-C Nutrition Program**

Bristol considers the Nutrition Programs and its offerings to be a cornerstone to maintaining elder independence. The Nutrition Program's fundamental work is the lunchtime meal offered to those age 60 years or older. Menus are planned by Bristol's Nutritionist and prepared by a professional caterer. They are designed to provide at least one-third of the recommended daily nutritional requirements for older adults and utilize available commodity products.

Bristol is a member of the Healthy Eating/Active Living (HEAL) task force that brings together many resources that contribute to improved nutrition and increased activity levels of adults and children in the greater Fall River area. HEAL aims to reduce the SNAP GAP and advocates to maintain the Healthy Incentives Program.

Bristol will continue to address food insecurity through various means including but not limited to, grants, membership on the local Department of Transitional Assistance Advisory Board, and regional coordination of Senior Farmers' Market Coupons. Nutrition Program staff work with local COAs to ensure that coupons are distributed per guidelines and redistributed among the towns as needed. During the pandemic, Nutrition Program staff distributed the coupons in the communities where the COAs were closed or unable to distribute the coupons. All COAs are participating in 2021.

The most recent satisfaction survey indicated that consumers are interested in having more food variety. Bristol will maximize the program's efforts to ensure elder independence by making meals pleasing. The Nutritionist will work with the caterer to increase menu options and engage the Consumer Advisory Committee to provide ongoing feedback.

Bristol's Nutrition Program complies with the mandate to ensure that meal participants have a shelf-stable food supply for times that meal delivery is not possible due to severe weather or other emergency situations. The Nutrition Program will continue its practice of providing a shelf-stable pack of three individually wrapped meals to each new participant and replenishing the supply to ongoing consumers as the meal pack is used. The shelf stable meal packs contain approximately one-third of the Daily Recommended Intake.

Community meal sites closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Bristol provided both home delivered meals and grab-and-go options. At present, congregate meal sites are reopening. Bristol's Nutrition Program Director is, and will continue to, communicate with COA Directors that currently have no site to evaluate the feasibility of initiating offerings at least one day a week. The plan is to have congregate meal availability in all 15 communities. A second goal is to increase meal site attendance by sponsoring special events. The Nutritionist will offer educational programming at sites as an additional way to foster increased attendance.

Food insecurity increased during the pandemic, and Bristol was awarded funding to alleviate the problem. Through a Fall River Community Development Agency grant, Bristol provides, three days a week, a delivered meal to up to 25 disabled individuals under 60 years of age. Additionally, up to 50 low to moderate-income older adults and disabled individuals receive two

days of food and snacks. That number will increase through an in-house and community outreach effort. Bristol will continue to assess needs and respond with services and supports that meet the nutritional needs of the region's older adults.

#### Future Goals:

- Bristol will provide information and education on nutritional topics. The staff Nutritionist will conduct sessions regarding healthy eating via telephone conference, zoom, or in person at congregate meal sites throughout the region. Meals on wheels recipients will receive similar printed information regularly on the back of the menu.
- Bristol's Nutritionist will become certified on the evidence-based program "Healthy Eating for Successful Living" and conduct it twice per year at different sites within the service area with a focus on reaching out to residents of housing authority and other subsidized buildings and those in rural/remote areas of the PSA. The agency will work with Fall River cable television to determine the feasibility of filming a cooking program series for distribution throughout the region.
- Bristol will expand therapeutic meal offering to all communities within the PSA.
- Bristol's meals offer recipients a nutritious choice that maximizes commodity food products. In light of the most recent satisfaction survey's noting that consumers would like more variety on the menu, the Nutritionist will work with Bristol's caterer to provide increased offerings.
- The Consumer Advisory Council will provide input on the meals.
- The Nutrition Program will undertake a recruitment campaign to ensure having a full complement of paid drivers.

#### **IV. Title III-D Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Services**

Bristol's evidence-based programs (EBP) operate as a direct service under a waiver from Elder Affairs. These programs support older adults in maximizing their independence and are congruent with the identified needs regarding the high incidence of chronic disease. The Matter of Balance (MOB) program and the Chronic Disease Self-Management (CDSMP) curricula address physical aspects of aging, assertiveness, and encourage speaking with family and medical professionals to address issues. In the Savvy Caregiver program, participants who care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other form of progressive dementia, are shown how to create and modify strategies that they can implement to lessen their own stress and improve levels of care. Currently Bristol has staff who coach each of these programs and has successfully completed a virtual version of one program. Bristol's Nutritionist will become certified in the Healthy Eating for Successful Living program.

Bristol plans to offer virtual programming for the Savvy Caregiver, MOB, and CDSM programs at least twice a year. Sessions will be held throughout the PSA with a focus on reaching residents of subsidized housing and remote areas. Bristol will also assist with loaning technology equipment and assisting with obtaining internet access. Bristol will continue to pursue opportunities to provide EBPs to alleviate social isolation and allow for homebound individuals to participate.

## V. Title III- E Massachusetts Family Caregiver Support Program

- *Caregiver Support*

The Caregiver Support Program assists program participants by phone or in-person consultation. Services include developing Caregiver Action Plans; providing resources and educational material; making referrals to support groups, home care, and respite services; offering financial scholarships and grants; and conducting evidence-based programs. Bristol's goal is to enable caregivers to provide the best possible care through enhancing coping skills, increasing knowledge, and minimizing the stress of caregiving. The program is available to people of any age who provide care to a person age 60 or older; persons age 60 years or older who are the primary caregivers of an adult developmentally disabled child; or grandparents age 55 or older who are raising a minor grandchild. Most callers are enrolled in the program for fewer than five months, and 75% find the services "very helpful."

The Caregiver Support Program has been able to provide electronic pets, respite services, and cards to assist consumers and caregivers financially. The Caregiver Support Program was also able to provide a tablet and a laptop for two consumers. Bristol plans to continue to offer this assistance to meet the needs of consumers over the next four years.

Bristol currently partners with, and will continue its collaboration with, CCBC to provide additional support for caregivers who may be in crisis or may need behavioral health supports. Services include development of an ongoing support group, training for caregivers, provision of tablets to some elders/caregivers, and scholarships for respite and other expenses related to behavioral health sessions.

- *Isolation*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention summarizes a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)<sup>4</sup> that points out that nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated. There is strong evidence that many adults are lonely in ways that put their health at risk, including premature death from all causes, increased risk of dementia, depression, anxiety, and suicide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bristol helped two COAs and one agency serving developmentally disabled adults distribute tablets to their consumers to participate in classes and activities, allowing them to remain connected with family and friends. This new way of working will allow greater opportunity in the future for participation in groups despite everyday barriers to in-person attendance. Bristol will monitor best practices and advocate for increased access to technology for all older adults and inform the community about virtual activities such as education, events, and support groups to help reduce social isolation.

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<sup>4</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>.



Bristol plans to reach out to the local community college and technical high school to collaborate on providing basic computer training for older adults to allow them more opportunities to attend trainings, EBPs, and virtual medical appointments.

- *Employment/Workforce*

Approximately 60% of those responding to Bristol's Needs Assessment rated fair or poor the ability for older adults and those with disabilities to find appropriate employment. A study by Stanford Graduate School of Business states that older adults have a strong desire to work, especially in jobs with flexible schedules.<sup>5</sup> Bristol's Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition includes members, such as SER Jobs for Progress, who work directly with those reentering the workforce. Bristol's CEO is a member of the Bristol County MassHire Advisory Board. The Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition will encourage trainings and promote policies that are designed to encourage flexible work opportunities for older adults and those with disabilities. The goal is to increase the number of individuals who benefit from part-time and full-time careers.

As highlighted both in Bristol's Needs Assessment and in studies and actions at the State and federal level, there is a crisis in having a workforce that can provide in-home, community-based supports. Bristol's CEO is Chair of the Provider's Council, which offers high-quality public policy research, advocacy opportunities, education, and training. Bristol recognizes the need of a strong, well-trained, and diverse workforce to meet the needs of older adults in the community and therefore encourages aging network partners to support the Caring Force campaign. This effort brings public awareness of human services workers who help people to remain in the least restrictive, most independent settings possible. Human services workers are undercompensated, and the Caring Force is advocating to advance legislation to improve compensation and benefits that will result in reduced turnover and more experienced staff on the frontlines of the industry. This in turn will improve the care that older adults receive by providing more consistency. Bristol has a high level of involvement in increasing the workforce. Three staff are Caring Force "ambassadors" who participate in the agency's orientation, explaining to new hires the concept and increasing advocacy. The activity will continue.

Mass Home Care is another trade association that is advocating to clarify the established rate setting process that directly impacts and determines the ability of providers to retain and recruit enough staff to meet the Commonwealth's need to ensure the provision of home health and home care services. Through membership in these organizations, Bristol will continue to advocate for fair and adequate funding for human services/aging network partners.

Bristol actively posts job vacancies with the Department of Unemployment Assistance (MassHire), SER-Jobs for Progress, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the Senior Community Service Employment Program, and other organizations that work with minority and low-income individuals. Bristol also has positions that are designed to work with job training

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<sup>5</sup> Older Americans Would Work Longer If Jobs Were Flexible Ameriks, J., Briggs, J., Caplin, A., Lee, M., Shapiro, M. D., & Tonetti, C. (2018, October 2). <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/gsb-box/route-download/471351>

programs serving individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Bristol's Human Resources Manager attends job fairs, such as the one hosted by the Commonwealth in August.

### **Goal: Participant-Directed/Person-Centered Planning**

Bristol offers the Consumer Directed Care (CDC) program and educates elders and disabled individuals about the Personal Care Attendant program. These participant-directed programs offer consumers the ability to select and hire their own workers to perform personal care, homemaking services, shopping, or other tasks. The programs can be especially valuable for those who wish to hire family members or workers fluent in their native language. Bristol, as a member of Mass Home Care, also advocates to include "spouses" within the definition of family member. This is another way in which Bristol can help recruit and retain enough home care workers to meet the needs of older adults. The agency will maximize the use of the self-directed programs.

Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP) Independence Plus allows consumers to develop an individualized service plan and purchase goods and services that best meet their needs. The program encourages older adults to identify their health and well-being goals and address barriers through both traditional and non-traditional means. The Home Care case management team will review ECOP participants to identify consumers who would benefit from this program and enroll additional consumers in ECOP Independence Plus.

The Veterans Independence Plus (VIP) program provides veterans of any age who are at risk of nursing home placement with the opportunity to receive services to enable them to live in their own homes and communities. This program allows a veteran to receive a comprehensive assessment to identify needs and preferences, develop an individual budget and service plan, and purchase goods and services (including the hiring, training, and termination of employees) that best meet their needs. Participants in this program control the goods and services purchased to help them remain in the community. Currently, Bristol has four consumers enrolled in the VIP program. Referrals to the program come from the Veterans Administration (VA). Bristol is prepared to enroll all future referrals. Management staff participate in monthly calls held by VA management staff to remain current on any program changes. A Bristol staff person convenes monthly with the VIP coordinator and is part of a workgroup working towards streamlining the process for consumers to become enrolled.

Bristol is a lead member of the Aging & Disability Resource Consortium of Southeastern & Southern Massachusetts (ADRC SE SM). The ADRC SE SM's goal is to support elders and persons with disabilities who have long-term support needs to be empowered to age with dignity and independence in the community. By coordinating outreach and conducting annual cross training sessions among partners, ADRC SE SM minimizes consumer and provider confusion, reduces the number of calls consumers have to make to get the information they need, empowers consumers to find needed services, and enhances individual choice. A goal of the ADRC SE SM will be to educate residents about COVID-19 vaccinations and facilitate their receiving them.

The Senior SAFE program is a fire prevention education program designed to improve the fire and life safety of older adults through education that addresses the unique fire risks for this age

group. Programs include education, installation of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and other fire and falls prevention devices. Bristol continues to partner with Fall River Fire Department to advance the program's mission.

In 2019 the Town of Somerset and the COA applied for and the town was designated as an Age-Friendly community by AARP. In 2020 Fall River, through a joint application from Bristol, the City of Fall River, and its COA, received Age-Friendly designation. Both communities are dedicated to promoting an inclusive and accessible environment for all. Each community is in the process of creating an action plan based on the outcomes of a jointly conducted needs assessment. This assessment was an opportunity for those age 50 and older to express their opinion on what is working and what needs to be improved to make these communities places in which they would want to grow older and how to stay independent while doing so. The Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition is dividing members into work groups to examine the Needs Assessment Executive Summary and develop an implementation plan. The activities will commence in FFY 2022 across the greater Fall River area. The intent is to make these communities a place where seniors want to live and younger people stay. Bristol encourages other aging leaders within the PSA to take similar steps in their communities and will lend knowledge and expertise to assist them through the process.

Of particular concern is access to behavioral health resources including dealing with hoarding and housing stabilization to prevent homelessness. Bristol will work with community organizations to address such issues. The agency will determine the feasibility of researching and undertaking programming on the topic. As mentioned above, Bristol's CPO's participation on GBCATCH will enhance the efforts. GBCATCH is the Continuum of Care (CoC) for the region.

Bristol plans to offer education and promote awareness to staff and the community regarding LBGTQ needs. Bristol has reached out to other agencies in the Commonwealth of MA with existing robust programs to discuss program development and collaboration successes. Bristol is rolling out its updated education plans which will be within the scope of Elder Affairs' recommendations and guidelines.

### **Goal: Elder Justice**

Bristol's Protective Services program responds to reports of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, caretaker neglect, and self-neglect. Bristol will ensure that the program is effective and compliant by configuring the department to maximize capacity. The agency has an after-hours response system that promotes parity and consumer safety. Staff provide training to mandated reporters and educate the public regarding preventing and identifying abuse, neglect, and exploitation. A joint educational session between the Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition and Age-Friendly New Bedford is planned for the public in FFY 2022.

Bristol's Protective Services program serves as the lead agency in the Southeast region, responsible for the ongoing recruitment of volunteers and organizing of regular Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) meetings. FAST teams were developed to assist protective services

workers who investigate allegations of financial exploitation and work to remedy abuse. Financial investigations have become more complex involving investments, real estate, trust accounts, legal documents, scams, credit cards, and refinancing. The FAST team is comprised of financial professionals, bankers, legal personnel, and law enforcement allowing the right professional to be selected to assist depending on the circumstances.

The Bristol County District Attorney's Office (DA) has received a grant to train civilian police advocates to review police reports and offer supports and services to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Bristol's Protective Services staff will work with the DA's office to facilitate the roll out of this initiative.

Elder Affairs is facilitating linkage for the statewide Protective Services programs to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission's Sexual Assault Response Unit which provides navigators who can assist survivors with support in the community, including peer support. This will be a beneficial resource to elders who meet the criteria for this service. This linkage has just been introduced and will be an area of focus in the upcoming year.

The Greater Fall River Age/Dementia Friendly Coalition, as mentioned previously, educates employers including banks. Bank employees may notice customers struggling with financial transactions, often an early indicator of dementia, before the behavior is apparent to family members. By identifying a potential problem, steps can be taken to safeguard assets and mitigate financial abuse.

Bristol management serve on the Coastline's Money Management Advisory Council. This program assists low-income older adults who have difficulty writing checks, balancing their check books, and managing their money. The service helps older adults who might be at risk of losing their independence due to their inability to pay basic rent, food, and utility bills on time. The program provides trained volunteers as bill payers, and they can also serve as an approved rep payee. This is another tool to help protect older adults and prevent financial abuse.

The DA's office has had representation on Bristol's Board of Directors and has been invited to nominate another person. The office remains committed to aggressively investigating and prosecuting allegations of elder abuse. DA staff work collectively with Bristol and key agencies to prevent and eliminate elder abuse through education, awareness, advocacy, intervention, and resource development. Community partners encourage the reporting of elder abuse and neglect.

Bristol advocates for older adults impacted by behavioral health and substance abuse issues by being a member of the MA Elder Mental Health Collaborative. The group is focused on identifying the behavioral health needs of older adults, identifying service gaps, and exploring best practices to improve service delivery, fill gaps, and replicate successful programs in Massachusetts. The Collaborative promotes prevention, outreach, wrap around peer and clinical supports and gatekeeping services; training and education; and partnerships on the local and state levels, and connection to the National Coalition on Aging and Mental Health.

Housing problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of the federal and state eviction moratoriums coming to an end are a top concern. Bristol supports, through a Title III-B

grant, SCCLS to fight evictions. The organization has prepared resources to assist older adults with the issue by adding staff, conducting education, and tackling technology issues.

Housing is traditionally the largest problem that SCCLS handles, with 152 cases closed through July 2021. Other topics that the legal program sees frequently include employment (22 cases), housing (91 cases) and public benefits (15 cases). Approximately half of all older adults they serve are low-income, just over half are socially needy, and about 21% are minorities.

The I&R department maintains lists of local, state, and national legal resources. The information includes referral hotlines, programs that specialize in elder law or LGBTQ+ needs, and the availability of consultations at COAs by private attorneys. Information about scams is posted on the agency's website and Facebook page periodically so that older adults can be educated to protect themselves.

At the time of intake, consumers are offered information about their local COA and emergency management agencies. A simple form can be returned to Bristol, and if the consumer wishes, it is shared with the local agencies. Each consumer is also assigned a risk level which identifies those who need daily support from vendors ensuring that their services are prioritized in case of inclement weather or emergency.

Bristol's Emergency Response Plan is designed to keep the agency operating in times of crisis so that staff may assist clients and the community in the best way possible. Staff seamlessly transitioned to working at home when the COVID-19 pandemic closed offices. The organization has continued to develop new protocols and acquire equipment to improve functionality, and this will strengthen Bristol and its resources in the future. Bristol also has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Elder Care Network members designed to provide mutual aid during and after an emergency or natural disaster.

### **Conclusion**

Bristol will meet the existing and developing needs of older adults within the PSA. The agency will maximize opportunities for community-based living in conjunction with organizations in both the public and private sectors leveraging all funding sources within its purview. Over the next four years, Bristol will work to achieve the established goals through updated objectives for each year.