

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Florida Department of Elder Affairs Expands Care and Leverages Innovation in Serving Florida's Seniors

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) highlights year-to-date successes in promoting Governor Ron DeSantis' priority of promoting the well-being, safety, and independence of Florida's seniors, their families, and caregivers.

"Governor Ron DeSantis is committed to serving Florida's seniors, and Florida is leading in providing innovative solutions to meet the critical needs of its most vulnerable population," **said Secretary Michelle Branham.** "We look forward to building on the great work and successes of the past year – serving the needs of the nearly 6 million adults over the age of 60 in Florida, connecting them with the services and resources they need to live well and age well here in our state."

Key Year-to-Date Successes Include:

Expanding Community Care for the Elderly and the Alzheimer's Disease Initiative

DOEA saw a combined \$14 million increase for Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) and the Alzheimer's Disease Initiative (ADI) following Governor DeSantis' signing of the 2021-2022 Budget.

ADI provides training and services to meet the changing needs of individuals, families, and caregivers living with Alzheimer's disease and similar memory disorders. Services include respite care for those who are caring for those diagnosed as having probable Alzheimer's disease or other related memory disorders where mental changes appear and interfere with the activities of daily living. Additionally, the CCE program serves individuals aged 60 and over by providing community-based services organized in a continuum of care to help functionally impaired older adults live in the least restrictive yet most cost-effective environment suitable to their needs. Both ADI and CCE provide Florida seniors and their caregivers the opportunity to remain in the community of their choosing rather than a long-term care facility.

Securing State's First Dedicated Dementia Director

DOEA hired Florida's first dedicated Dementia Director in July 2021 to provide Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia (ADRD) support and leadership within Florida's executive branch. The Dementia Director now serves 11 Planning and Service Areas as the state's liaison, building bridges among government agencies and private partnerships to solidify Florida's dementia infrastructure and continue to prioritize ADRD in a state that has the second-highest prevalence of the disease in the country. The Alzheimer's Disease Advisory Committee will work closely with the Dementia Director to accomplish the committee's 2021 recommendations. The Florida Legislature established a dementia director position in 2020 as one of eight states to initiate this priority.

Increasing Education and Awareness to Protect and Support Seniors

EssentiALZ – Increasing access to professional ADRD training, improving the quality and care of vulnerable residents, and aiding in the professional development of a critical Florida industry. More than 6,000 sessions are currently available free of charge for direct care workers.

ALZ STARS – Collaborating with the 16 Dementia Care and Care Initiative (DCCI) Task Forces and the Alzheimer’s Association to provide community member training, increase awareness and reduce stigma through the online location-based program.

Supporting Seniors Through Innovative Technology

Project VITAL – DOEA and the Alzheimer’s Association continue to build on the success of the Project Virtual Inclusive Technology for All (VITAL) initiative, providing seniors with specially designed tablets allowing them to remain virtually engaged and connected. This effort supports the well-being of seniors, their families, and caregivers.

Robotic companions – DOEA partnered with Ageless Innovation’s Joy for All® Companion Pets to deliver nearly 9,000 therapeutic robotic pets to socially isolated seniors and adults living with Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementia (ADRD). Interactive companions help combat loneliness, depression and improve the overall mood and quality of life for older individuals living with ADRD. Additionally, family caregivers benefit from the reduction in stress as robotic pets increase engagement in the environment with those in their care.

Prioritizing Seniors First

Feeding Older Floridians Restaurant Meal Initiative – DOEA strengthened home-delivered meal assistance and built on the success of its Feeding Older Floridians Restaurant Meal Initiative launched in 2020. More than 6.5 million home-delivered meals were provided to Florida seniors by local providers and partnerships through the initiative. The innovative meal program furthers the efforts to prioritize senior care in the state, affording providers unprecedented program flexibility in service delivery to meet the critical needs of Florida seniors.

We Will Meet You at Home Campaign – DOEA launched the ‘We Will Meet You at Home’ campaign in Summer 2021 throughout the state to provide homebound seniors access to COVID-19 vaccinations to ensure every older adult who wanted a shot, received a shot. DOEA and the state’s 11 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) offered seniors access to transportation and arranged for a health care professional to provide vaccination at an individual’s house.

About the Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the State Unit on Aging, helps Florida’s elders to remain healthy, safe, and independent. The Department provides most direct services through its Division of Statewide Community-Based Services, which works through the state’s 11 Area Agencies on Aging and local service providers to deliver essential services to a vital segment of the population. For more information, please visit www.elderaffairs.org.

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