

# NEWSLTR

A PUBLICATION OF THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ELDER AFFAIRS

## AGE-FRIENDLY LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Click [here](#) for more information on Age-Friendly Livable Communities.

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## Miami-Dade County Communities Pave the Way as Age-Friendly Leader

*By: Margie Bell, Livable Communities Coordinator, Florida Department of Elder Affairs*

Two of Florida's 44 Livable Communities, the City of Miami Beach and the City of Hialeah, offer programs to their elders, making their community a place where all residents can live well and age well.

In addition to commemorating more than 30 years of serving Florida's seniors, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) spotlighted its Food Assistance Program in March for National Nutrition Month. DOEA's food delivery services provide food benefits, access to a healthy diet, and education on food preparation and nutrition to low-income households. Food assistance programs offer more than just a meal. Dietitians and other professionals in the aging



**ABOVE** Florida Department of Elder Affairs Secretary Michelle Branham (lower right) speaks to seniors in the City of Hialeah.

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**DEMENTIA**  
CARE & CURE INITIATIVE  
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ELDER AFFAIRS



PHONE: (850) 414-2000

TDD: (850) 414-2001

EMAIL: [LivableFL@elderaffairs.org](mailto:LivableFL@elderaffairs.org)

## Miami-Dade County Communities Pave the Way as Age-Friendly Leader...continued from page 1

network also provide nutrition education, counseling, and risk screening. Sixty-nine percent of adult care food program providers are in Miami-Dade County. Secretary Branham visited livable communities in Miami-Dade County including the City of Hialeah and the City of Miami Beach and highlighted their senior programs as an example to help create program ideas for elders across the state of Florida. For more information about DOEA's nutrition programs such as the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program, [click here](#).

**RIGHT** Activities at North Beach Unidat Center



**ABOVE** Secretary Branham toured North Beach Unidat Senior Center and experienced all of the quality programs the City of Miami Beach has to offer its seniors.

**LEFT** Villa Mariposa, a Hialeah Housing Community.

**RIGHT** Exterior of North Beach Unidat Senior Center, the City of Miami Beach, Florida.





## The Secretary's Message

### Secretary Michelle Branham

As his good friend and colleague, I am thankful for the guidance and advice he has given me to ensure a smooth and seamless transition.

My plans as Secretary include to prepare us for a year of celebration as the Department commemorates more than 30 years of incredible service to Floridians. We have much to acclaim and commend through the advancement, flexibility, and collective heart of this Agency and its people – as well as the great support of Governor DeSantis and his Administration.

As we get to know each other better, you will come to see that the heart of my drive and passion lies in serving others and adhering to the mission and vision that I have taken an oath to uphold. Together, we will be promoting the well-being, safety, and

independence of Florida's seniors, their families, and caregivers. We will continue to ensure that senior Floridians live well and age well.

I see 2022 as a time of commemoration for 30 years of outstanding service to the over 5.9 million seniors we serve, as well as a year of hope and renewal for the future that lies before us for the next three decades.

To quote Mahatma Gandhi, "The future depends on what you do today" – so let us begin!

Best to all,

Secretary Branham

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs has been like a second home to me over the years as I worked alongside Secretary Prudom and many of you to advance Alzheimer's and related dementia priorities in our state. Now, I am incredibly honored for this opportunity to step into a new leadership role to address all seniors – building on the innovation, momentum, and devotion that Secretary Prudom has left with us.



**ABOVE LEFT** Secretary Branham tours the City of Hialeah's senior centers and highlight Hialeah's outstanding elder services, including the hot meal program.



**ABOVE RIGHT** Secretary Branham tours Hialeah Housing's affordable senior housing buildings, which improve the lives of District 103's growing senior population.



## The Florida Department of Elder Affairs Commemorates More Than 30 Years of Service

*By: The Florida Department of Elder Affairs*

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) is commemorating more than 30 years of serving Florida's seniors – and launching the next 30 years. Throughout 2022, DOEA will gather with stakeholders, provider-network staff, and Florida residents to commemorate the culmination of 30 years of serving Florida's seniors.

Florida's older adult population has grown from approximately 3 million in 1992 to nearly 6 million at present. Florida is home to 5.9 million adults over age 60, including 1.9 million people over the age of 75. Florida's robust population of seniors reinforces

the vital necessity of DOEA's work, which is guided by our agency-wide mission to promote the well-being, safety, and independence of Florida's seniors, their families, and caregivers to meet the agency's vision for all Floridians to live well and age well.

DOEA began operations in January of 1992 under Governor Lawton Chiles. The staff was made up of just six employees and some volunteers; E. Bentley Lipscomb served as the first secretary for the Department. Currently, DOEA houses over 25 programs and employs nearly 600 staff across the state.



**ABOVE RIGHT** Secretary Branham celebrated DOEA's 30th Anniversary by passing out "30+ Years" cupcakes to its hardworking staff at DOEA headquarters in Tallahassee, Florida.

# Livable Florida Initiatives Combating Social Isolation

By Margie Bell, Livable Communities Coordinator, Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) continues to engage in creative partnerships to support older Floridians in combating social isolation and depression during these unprecedented times of the pandemic. Loneliness and social isolation in older adults are serious public health risks affecting a significant number of older adults, putting them at risk for dementia and other serious medical conditions. Social isolation was associated with about a 50 percent increased risk of dementia and other serious medical conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Starting in April 2020, DOEA addressed issues related to socially isolated seniors and caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) by delivering 1,000 MP3 players to Florida's seniors and adults living with ADRD. It was crucial that Florida's older adults living with ADRD, and their caregivers not become socially isolated when the recommendation was to socially distance in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Music benefits caregivers and those living with dementia by reducing stress or distress, enhancing their mood, and increasing the ability to communicate effectively. Studies have shown music may reduce agitation and improve behavioral issues that are common in the middle stages of the disease. Even in the late stages of Alzheimer's, a person may be able to tap a beat or sing lyrics to a song from childhood.



Music provides a way to connect, even after verbal communication has become difficult. Each MP3 player was made possible through a donation from the Florida Alzheimer's Association and was delivered directly to those living with ADRD, their caregivers, and families.

Additionally, DOEA partnered with animatronic pet manufacturer Ageless Innovation to distribute hundreds of therapeutic robotic Joy for All<sup>®</sup> Companion Pets to older Floridians. Since April 2020, DOEA has delivered over 8,500 therapeutic robotic cats and dogs to socially isolated seniors and adults living with ADRD. No matter if you are a "cat person" or "dog person," the interactive pets offer an alternative to traditional pet therapy and help combat social isolation and depression among older individuals and people living with ADRD by improving overall mood and quality of life. Developed with extensive input from older adults, these companion pets look, sound, and feel like real pets. They provide many of the same benefits of traditional pet therapy. Recent research has proven that Joy for All<sup>®</sup> Companion Pets do the following:

- Enhance the well-being, sense of purpose, and quality of life of individuals living with a form of dementia;
- Reduce social isolation and depression; and
- Enhance interactions for caregivers and family members of older adults.

If you or a loved one living with ADRD would benefit from either an MP3 player or therapeutic robotic pet, please [click here](#) to complete the request form.

DOEA has received wonderful feedback from recipients of the robotic pets. One family member wrote to share this message:

"Just wanted to thank you for the 'Joy for All' companion we received. What a wonderful gift for my husband. They sing and laugh together and share stories. The robotic pets are a terrific idea bringing comfort to the elderly. It is programmed perfectly to respond to your voice. Thank you so much." Mrs. W.

1 <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>



## Creating Inclusion Through Acceptance

*By Janeil Jackson, Deputy Communications Director, Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities*

We celebrate World and National Autism Awareness Month every April. World Autism Awareness Day is recognized on April 2. Started by the Autism Society in 1970, Autism Awareness Month aims to bring about understanding, inclusion, and empowerment of people on the autism spectrum. Autism acceptance encourages a world where every individual in the autism community has access to the support and resources needed when they need them.

“Autism Awareness Month is all about creating awareness, acceptance, and inclusion of individuals with this diagnosis. Autistic cases in the U.S. rose from one in 125 children in 2010 to one in 59 children in 2020,” said Agency for Persons with Disabilities Director Barbara Palmer. “Great strides have been made over the years to include individuals with autism in all walks of life.”

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is

a complex developmental disability that can cause challenges with social, communication, and behavioral skills. In most cases, there are no physical traits related to a person with ASD, but the way a person with ASD communicates, interacts, behaves, and learns may vary compared to most others. The cognitive abilities of a person with ASD can range from gifted to severely intellectually disabled. While some individuals with ASD require a large amount of assistance, others can and do live a relatively normal life.

Individuals with ASD are often born with the disorder. Signs of ASD begin before age 3 and usually last throughout their life. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), symptoms of ASD can show as early as the first 12 months of life and sometimes as late as 24 months or more. Some children with ASD may develop new skills early but stop gaining new skills or lose already learned skills around 18 to 24 months of age. ASD is classified as one umbrella term with three different stages: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, and Asperger

syndrome.

According to Autism Speaks, the following signs could be an indicator that your child may be at risk for ASD.

### **By Six months**

- Few or no big smiles or other warm, joyful, and engaging expressions
- Limited or no eye contact

### **By Nine months**

- Little or no back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions

### **By 12 months**

- Little or no babbling
- Little or no back-and-forth gestures such as pointing, showing, reaching, or waving
- Little or no response to name

### **By 16 months**

- Very few or no words

### **By 24 months**

- Very few or no meaningful,

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## Creating Inclusion Through Acceptance...continued from page 6

two-word phrases (not including imitating or repeating)

sounds, smells, tastes, textures, lights, and/or colors

children on the spectrum may also exist in adults. Although treatment is usually recommended for children, adults with ASD may also find specific types of treatments and services to be helpful. It is important to recognize that treatment does not aim to cure ASD, instead, it helps individuals address and manage issues such as anxiety, depression, or rigid thinking. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms related to ASD, consult a doctor or mental health professional for a formal autism evaluation.

### At any age

- Loss of previously acquired speech, babbling, or social skills
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Persistent preference for solitude
- Difficulty understanding other people's feelings
- Delayed language development
- Persistent repetition of words or phrases (echolalia)
- Resistance to minor changes in routine or surroundings
- Restricted interests
- Repetitive behaviors (flapping, rocking, spinning, etc.)
- Unusual and intense reactions to

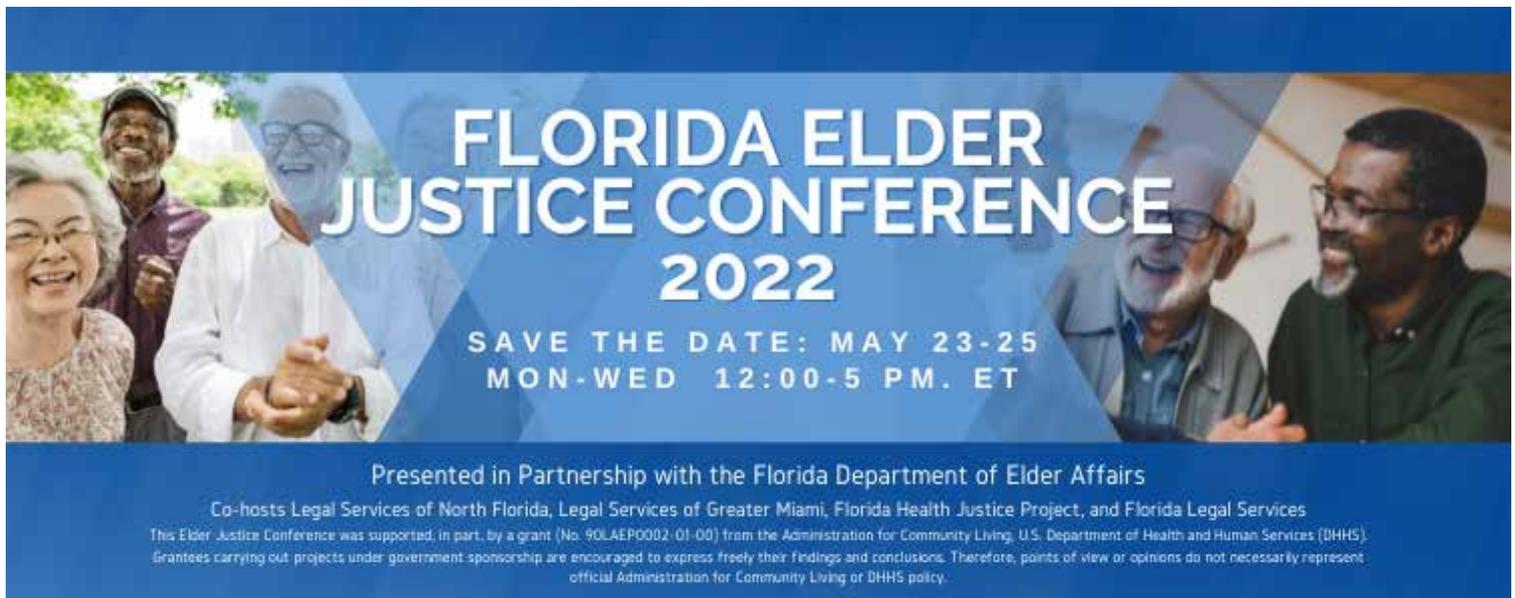
The causes of ASD are still unknown; however, researchers have learned there is likely a combination of genetic and nongenetic, or environmental, influences that play a factor. According to the CDC, ASD occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Factors like family income, lifestyle, or educational level do not affect a child's risk of autism. ASD is found to be four times more common among boys than girls.

There is no cure for ASD, but research shows child development can improve using early intervention treatment services. These services can help with a child's ability to learn crucial skills from birth to age 3. Similar symptoms that appear in

To learn more about National Autism Awareness Month and treatment options for autism symptoms in children and adults, visit <https://autismsociety.org/autism-acceptance-month/>.

## JOIN US

We are excited to announce that registration is open for the Florida Elder Justice Conference to be held virtually May 23 – 25, 2022. Please use this link to register and check out the evolving conference website: <https://pheedloop.com/EVEACYPNOSJK/site/home/>.



**FLORIDA ELDER JUSTICE CONFERENCE 2022**

SAVE THE DATE: MAY 23-25  
MON-WED 12:00-5 PM. ET

Presented in Partnership with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs

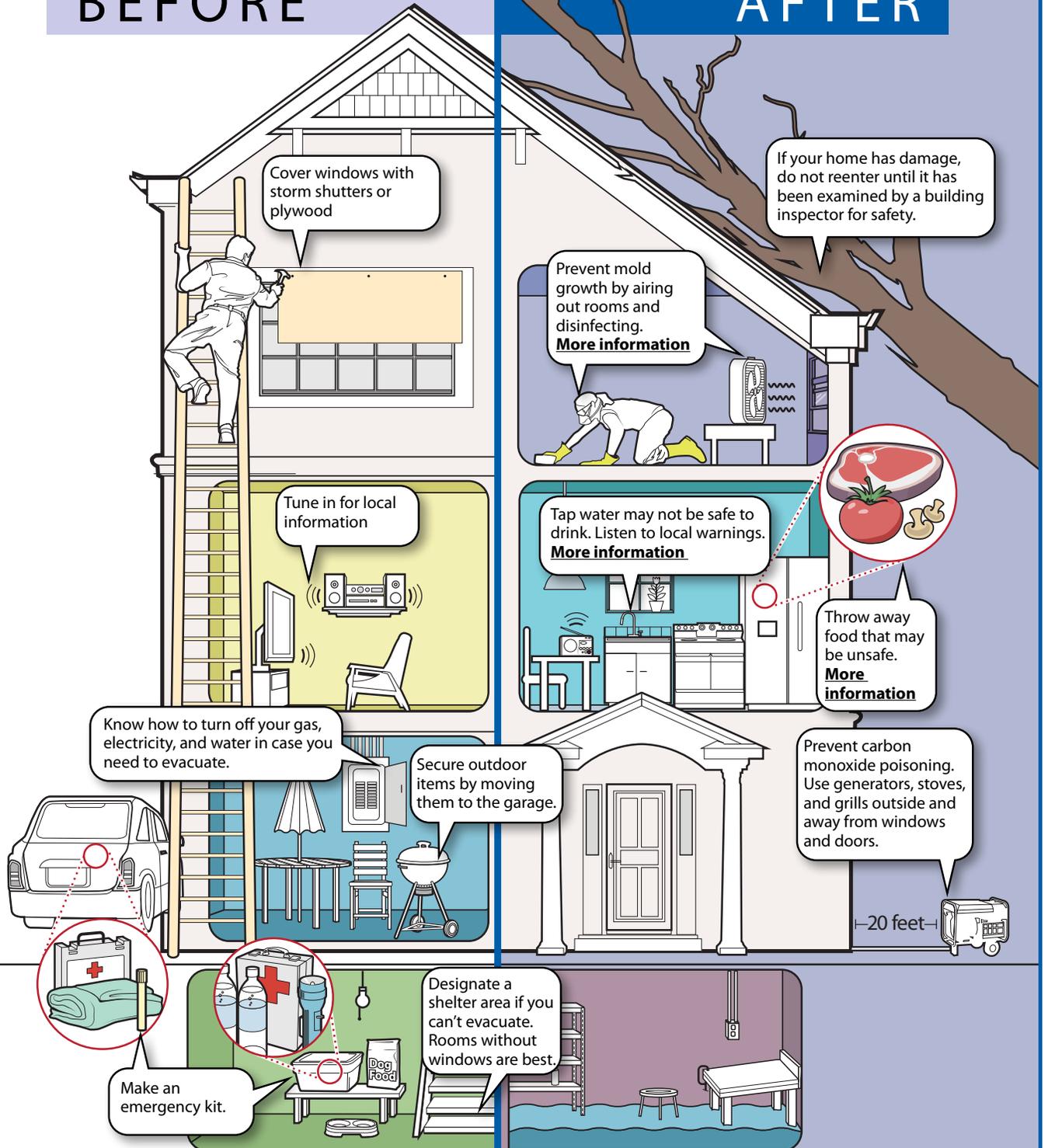
Co-hosts Legal Services of North Florida, Legal Services of Greater Miami, Florida Health Justice Project, and Florida Legal Services

This Elder Justice Conference was supported, in part, by a grant (No. 90LAEP0002-01-00) from the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living or DHHS policy.

# Be ready! Hurricanes

## BEFORE

## AFTER





## The Senior Community Service Employment Program

*By Krysta Carter, State Director,  
Senior Community Service  
Employment Program, Florida  
Department of Elder Affairs*

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is working hard to keep seniors working. As the only job training program Federally administered under Title V of the Older Americans Act, SCSEP provides useful opportunities to participants through hands-on job training through community service. This experience provides the skills needed to transition participants into unsubsidized employment.

The COVID-19 health emergency had a tremendous impact on our way of

life. These impacts have been felt especially with the senior population. As we adjust to a post-COVID-19 world and find our place among society, it's important that we address some basic needs of Florida's senior population. SCSEP provides a source of income allowing economic self-sufficiency and the ability to remain a vital part of Florida's workforce, reduces social isolation, promotes community engagement, and significantly improves long-term outcomes for our senior population.

SCSEP is excited to reintroduce participants to the workforce and reconnect with our not-for-profit agencies who work diligently to improve the lives of Floridians. With

continued support from partners and Livable Communities, SCSEP maintains successful outcomes of training and employment for seniors and the Department's mission for all Floridians to live well and age well.

### **SCSEP Website:**

<https://elderaffairs.org/programs-services/senior-community-service-employment-program-scsep>

For more information, contact Krysta Carter at [carterk@elderaffairs.org](mailto:carterk@elderaffairs.org) or (850) 414-2171.



# HOPEFLORIDA

A PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY

**Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity**, a new initiative spearheaded by First Lady Casey DeSantis and implemented by the Florida Department of Children and Families, utilizes ‘Care Navigators’ to guide Floridians on an individualized path to prosperity by focusing on community collaboration between the private sector, faith-based community, nonprofits and government entities to break down traditional community silos, in an effort to maximize resources and uncover opportunities.

These ‘Care Navigators’ are essential in helping individuals identify their unique and immediate barriers to prosperity, develop long-term goals, map out a strategic plan, and work to ensure all sectors of the community have a ‘seat at the table’ and are part of the solution.

### Who benefits from A Pathway to Prosperity?

- Public benefit customers statewide
- Children aging out of foster care
- Pregnant mothers contending with substance abuse disorders
- Parents and families who need assistance

### Services offered by ‘Care Navigators’:

- Identifying goals and barriers
- Referrals to local, community-based partners
- One-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve economic self-sufficiency



If you need to connect with a ‘Care Navigator,’ call: **850.300.HOPE**

*Communities coming together to create A Pathway to Prosperity*



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### April

#### Autism Awareness Month

**Safe Mobility for Life Theme:**  
**Beyond the Driver's Seat**

*Goal: Educate older adults about how to find all the transportation options available in their communities & empower them to practice these different options*

- 17 Easter
- 18 Tax Day
- 22 Earth Day
- 27 Administrative Professionals Day

### May

#### National Mental Health Awareness Month

**Older Americans Month - Age My Way 2022**

**Safe Mobility for Life Theme: You Hold the Keys**

*Goal: Educate Floridians on the keys to achieve safe mobility for life.*

- 1-7 Hurricane Preparedness Week
- 8 Mother's Day
- 15 Peace Officers Memorial Day
- 30 Memorial Day



# Age my way!



## Age My Way This May

### DOEA Celebrates Older Americans Month

Older adults play vital, positive roles in our communities – as family members, friends, mentors, volunteers, civic leaders, members of the workforce, and more. Just as every person is unique, so too is how they age and how they choose to do it – and there is no “right” way. That’s why the theme for Older Americans Month (OAM) 2022 is *Age My Way*.

Every May, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) leads the celebration of OAM. This year’s theme focuses on how older adults can age in their communities, living independently for as long as possible and participating in ways they choose.

While *Age My Way* will look different for each person, here are common things everyone can consider:

- **PLANNING:** Think about what you will need and want in the future, from home- and community-based services to community activities that interest you.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Remain involved and contribute to your community through work, volunteering, and/or civic participation opportunities.
- **ACCESS:** Make home improvements and modifications, use assistive technologies, and customize supports to help you better age in place.
- **CONNECTION:** Maintain social activities and relationships to combat social isolation and stay connected to your community.

This year, Livable Florida is excited to celebrate OAM with our partners in the aging community. Follow along throughout the month to find resources that address the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Categorized by the 8 Domains of Livability framework, the social determinants of

health include factors such as social support networks, neighborhood, and physical environment; socioeconomic status; education; appropriate and affordable housing; employment; and access to health care.

Diverse communities are strong communities. Ensuring that older adults remain involved and included in our communities for as long as possible benefits everyone. Please join Livable Florida’s mission in strengthening our community: Livable Florida embraces the positive possibilities of an aging population and is creating a place that people of all ages will want to call home!

Click [here](#) to sign up for our Livable Florida Newsletter and receive bi-monthly information on Livable Communities in Florida delivered to your inbox. Plus, you will have the option of receiving alerts on grant opportunities, webinars, and other items of interest to Florida communities.

For more information about Age My Way 2022, visit the official [OAM website](#), follow ACL on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and join the conversation using #OlderAmericansMonth.