



Spring 2010

The MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation has formed the MetroWest Commission on Healthy Aging, a sixteen-member panel that will help define what healthy aging should look like in the MetroWest area by 2020 and identify the steps needed to achieve this vision. The Commission's findings and recommendations will form the basis of the Foundation's new efforts to support healthy aging programs and services in its 25-town service area.

### **Why Healthy Aging**

The number of MetroWest residents 65 and older is projected to grow by 75% in the next twenty years. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 80% of Americans over age 65 have at least one chronic health condition and 50% have at least two. Low-income older adults, particularly those who live alone, are at even greater risk for poor health outcomes. In MetroWest nearly 8% of adults over the age of 65 live below the federal poverty level. We also know that over 30% of our MetroWest elder population over age 65 report having some type of disability whether sensory, physical, or some difficulty with daily living skills.

Most Americans drastically underestimate their chances of getting a chronic disease. An enhanced focus on promoting and preserving the health of older adults is essential if we are to effectively address the health and economic challenges of an aging society.

The Commission will explore a variety of issues, including chronic disease prevention and management; wellness, physical activity and nutrition; active living and community engagement and socialization; falls prevention; depression and substance abuse; and caregiver support.

### **Key Reasons to Support Healthy Aging**

- Health is strongly linked to the quality of life in older adulthood.
- Families, businesses and communities depend upon older adults every day as leaders, caregivers, mentors and volunteers.

- Older adults are at higher risk of losing their independence due to preventable injury and/or disability.
- Substantial amounts of health care costs can be avoided.
- Effective, low-cost programs that improve the health of older adults exist but are not widely offered.
- The societal costs of ignoring healthy aging will be catastrophic as the Baby Boomers reach older adulthood.

The Commission began meeting in early February and has already reviewed extensive data on the state of elder health in MetroWest. Future meetings will focus on physical health, social and emotional well being and transportation needs. The Commission's final report will include findings and recommendations that can help inform the Foundation's future funding priorities in this area.

The Commission includes sixteen "commissioners," all community members who have an interest in the issue of healthy aging, including advocates, providers of service and elders themselves. Bill McGinley of Whitney Place in Natick, the past chairman of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, serves as the chair of the Commission.

### Commission Members

Bill McGinley, Chair  
Whitney Place Assisted Living Residence

Christine Alessandro  
BayPath Elder Services

Karen Alves  
Franklin Council on Aging

Erica "Ricky" Ball  
Community Activist

Jay Ball  
Community Activist

Judith Boyko  
Century Health Systems

Janet Giele, Ph.D.  
The Heller School for Social Policy  
& Management

Esther Hopkins, Ph.D., J.D.  
Community Activist

Marc Jacobs, MSW  
Jewish Family Services of Metrowest

Kristin Kiesel  
Sudbury Council on Aging

Ruth Remington, Ph.D.  
University of Massachusetts Lowell

Cathy Romeo  
VNA Care Network & Hospice

Anna Romer  
Facing History & Ourselves

Fredericka "Derry" Tanner  
Parmenter VNA & Community Care

Milagros Abreu, M.D.  
Latino Health Insurance Program