

**Health and Social Services Consortium
Area Agency on Aging**

**Area Plan
Federal Fiscal Years
2026-2029**



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HESSCO Planning and Service Area Map

Program Service Area Communities

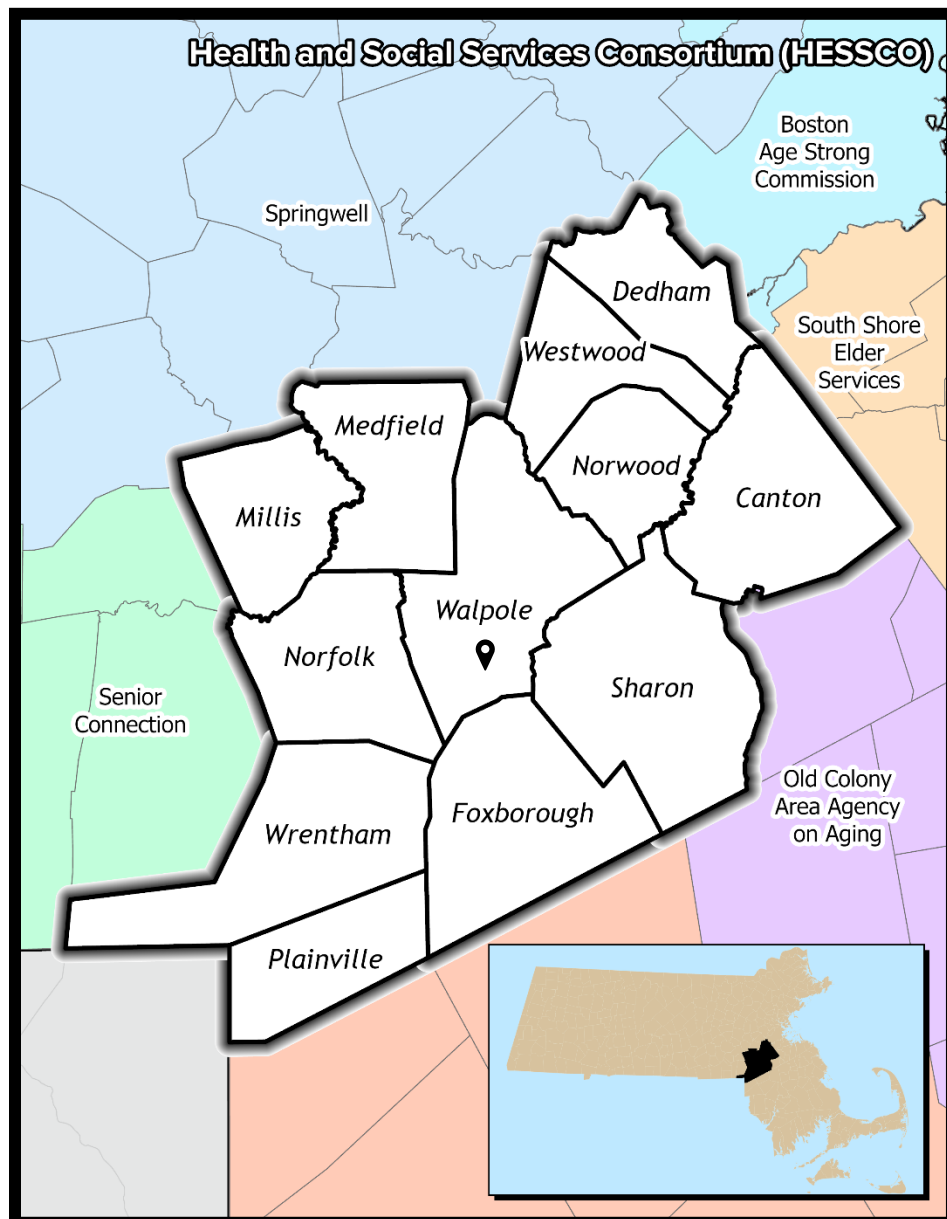
Canton, Dedham, Foxborough, Medfield, Millis, Norfolk, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Walpole, Westwood, Wrentham

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Since 1977, Health and Social Services Consortium, Inc (HESSCO) has served twelve communities in South Norfolk County by delivering a comprehensive system of services and supports that empower older adults and their caregivers. On a daily basis, older adults access care and support through HESSCO to maintain independence and age with dignity in their homes and communities, in the setting of their choosing.

The HESSCO Program Service Area (PSA) includes the following twelve towns: Canton, Dedham, Foxborough, Medfield, Millis, Norfolk, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Walpole, Westwood, and Wrentham. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, over 55,000 individuals over the age of 60 reside within the HESSCO PSA.

In 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) enacted by Congress authorized many of the programs and services that continue to provide critical support to older adults, especially those socially and economically isolated. This Act, most recently reauthorized in 2020, provides the foundation for the network of over 600 Area Agencies on Aging across the United States and territories. HESSCO is one of 20 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in Massachusetts. HESSCO also serves as one of 24 Aging Services Access Points (ASAP) within Massachusetts. As both the AAA and ASAP, HESSCO serves its PSA with a multitude of programs and services through these two designations. HESSCO also participates as a lead agency within the Aging and Disability Resource Consortium (ADRC), providing a no-wrong door approach to services and supports across the lifespan.

In its role as the Area Agency on Aging, HESSCO is a leader in planning and development of new approaches to aging well and works collaboratively with community partners to design and deliver innovative programs that respond to the needs of its communities. HESSCO leverages its expertise and resources to identify community needs, advocates for public policies and regulations that support positive aging, develops new programs to address emerging needs, builds coalitions, and engages stakeholders around the needs of older adults in its PSA.

To develop this Area Plan, HESSCO actively sought information on the needs of local older adults, researched trends and available data, and accessed state and federal guidance to ensure that this plan will guide HESSCO in its mission to support and empower older adults, their families and caregivers to live with dignity and in the manner and place of their choosing. This process included a local needs assessment that engaged 273 older adults across the PSA through surveys and focus groups, allowing HESSCO to hear directly from older adults about their needs, preferences, and concerns for aging in their community.

Focus Areas

The Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE), formerly named the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), which serves as the state unit on aging for the U.S. Administration for Community Living, has developed the focus areas which serve as pillars for aging service providers across the Commonwealth for the planning period. HESSCO uses these focus areas as

a framework to develop and provide the programs and services identified through this Area Plan process. These focus areas are:

1. Supporting the core programs of the Older Americans Act, a set of services authorized and funded through legislation;
2. Targeting services to older adults and family caregivers with the greatest economic and greatest social need;
3. Expanding access to home-and-community-based services to support older adults to age in place;
4. Enhancing services and support for family and informal caregivers, addressing the needs of caregivers using person-centered tools and supports.

HESSCO along with all Area Agencies on Aging across Massachusetts work to ensure that the services provided through the Older Americans Act reach those most in need of support to age well in its communities.

Local Needs Assessment

HESSCO completed a local needs assessment to develop this Area Plan. This local needs assessment encompassed five listening sessions with older adults and/or advocates for older adults, the distribution of a survey broadly across our networks, and surveying activity with five targeted groups of older adults. Through these efforts, HESSCO received input from 212 survey respondents and 61 participants at listening sessions comprised of older adults and/or their advocates to determine the priorities and concerns within the HESSCO PSA. The overall results of the focus groups and surveys showed that older adults want services that are both easily accessible and will help them remain in their home. Addressing issues related to transportation, economic security, health care and wellness are top priorities for local older adults.

As HESSCO completes a needs assessment process every four years, it has the benefit of comparison to prior needs assessments. Compared with prior years, this year's Needs Assessment project revealed a continued priority for survey respondents and listening session participants of services that are both easily accessible and will help them remain in their home with independence. Echoed in this year's results were the desires for access to a coordinated transportation system that will help residents get to their destinations, and concerns related to economic security and increased costs with food, housing, and health care.

Analysis from U.S. Census Bureau Data and population projections from the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute show that all twelve towns within the HESSCO program service area have seen population growth of individuals over age 60 since the 2020 Census and this is expected to continue over the duration of this Area Plan. When compared to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the HESSCO program service area will have a higher percentage of population growth of individuals over age 60 by the end of the Area Plan period. With this in mind, HESSCO acknowledges that the needs of the older adult population in our PSA may shift and change over the course of this Area Plan, and HESSCO is committed to soliciting feedback on an ongoing basis to stay abreast of the changing needs over time.

HESSCO Area Plan Goals

The HESSCO Area Plan outlines eight overarching goals of the Area Agency on Aging and then specifically identifies agency programs and processes that HESSCO will utilize to achieve the goals. The overarching goals identified within this plan are:

- Ensure consumers receive clear, accessible information about available services and supports, empowering them to make informed decisions that best meet their needs.
- Improve access and availability of transportation options across the program service area ensuring that consumers can get to the destinations that are important to them.
- Protect the rights of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers across the PSA and provide equal access to the justice system.
- Prevent, detect, assess, intervene and/or investigate elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.
- Offer evidence-based healthy aging programs that support disease prevention and health promotion and support age-friendly community initiatives across the PSA.
- Target vulnerable populations with specialized support and attention to encourage and facilitate participation in supporting programs and improve access to resources needed to foster improved social and health outcomes.
- Ensure that consumers have access to a full complement of services to meet their care needs and support individual preferences.
- Understand the unique needs of family and informal caregivers to enhance HESSCO's ability to provide relevant and useful support to individuals in these roles that empowers person-centered decision making and holistic care of the caregiver and care recipient unit.

Within these eight overarching goals, the HESSCO Area Plan provides guidance for the agency's comprehensive system of service and supports for older adults and their caregivers across the PSA. Some of the programs and processes involve furthering commitments already established while others involve innovations or strategies to address emerging needs. Throughout the Federal Fiscal Years 2026-2029 timeframe for this HESSCO Area Plan, HESSCO will continue to strengthen and support the programs that have become a cornerstone of care for older adults in our PSA. HESSCO is committed to remaining abreast of the needs of older adults and empowering them to live their life with dignity, in the place and manner of their choosing.

CONTEXT

HESSCO is one of 20 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in Massachusetts and one of 24 Aging Services Access Points (ASAP) within Massachusetts. HESSCO has served in its capacity as the Area Agency on Aging since 1977 and plays a significant role in planning and community development. HESSCO leverages its expertise and resources to advocate for public policies that support positive aging, develop new programs to address emerging needs and identify the needs of its community members. HESSCO continuously listens to its stakeholders and engages in coalition building to address the needs within its program service area (PSA).

HESSCO developed this Area Plan on Aging with direction and guidance from the Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) on federal and state focus areas and with direction and guidance from older adults and/or their advocates from within the HESSCO PSA. In addition, HESSCO has researched trends and data from within our PSA to understand our communities and the older adults and caregivers who reside within it.

Federal and State Focus Areas:

The Executive Office of Aging & Independence with the U.S. Administration for Community Living identified four primary focus areas that local Area Plans on Aging must address within their PSA:

- The Older Americans Act Core Programs are a set of services authorized and funded through federal legislation. They are grouped under broad categories that include the following:
 - Title III-B: Supportive services that provide access to services, in-home services, and legal services.
 - Title III-C1: Congregate meals that are located within community dining sites that offer nutritious meals, socialization, and various programs of interest to participants.
 - Title III-C2: Home delivered meals that provide a nutritious noon-time meal and a daily check-in for homebound elders.
 - Title III-D: Evidence-based health education that focuses on disease prevention and health promotion.
 - Title III-E: Family Caregiver Support Program that provides one-on-one counseling and information to caregivers as well as education programs.
 - Long Term Care Ombudsman Program that provides advocacy for residents of long term care facilities.
- Targeting services to older adults and family caregivers with the greatest economic and greatest social need, such as those most vulnerable population groups including low-income and limitedly resourced older adults; older adults with limited English proficiency; socially isolated older adults including minority populations or affinity groups such as those with LGBTQI+ and other cultural identities; individuals living with disability; those affected by Alzheimer's or related dementia diagnoses; individuals at risk for institutional placement; and the caregivers of older adults in these groups;

- Expanding access to a comprehensive network of home-and-community-based services to support older adults to age in place;
- Enhancing services and support for family and informal caregivers addressing the needs of caregivers using person-centered tools and supports.

HESSCO will use these focus areas to provide the framework for designing and providing aging services programs across the PSA for the duration of this Area Plan.

Local Needs Assessment

The Executive Office of Aging & Independence provides a format for each AAA to conduct a needs assessment within its PSA. HESSCO incorporates those findings into this Area Plan to ensure that the HESSCO Area Plan on Aging targets the needs of those older adults and their caregivers living within the PSA. HESSCO completed the formal needs assessment from October 1, 2024, to December 1, 2024. HESSCO conducted five different listening sessions/focus groups, distributed surveys broadly across our networks, and conducted surveying activities specifically with five target populations. These efforts provided a combination of in-person discussions, discussions over digital platforms such as Zoom, and survey results in English, Chinese, and Russian. HESSCO was able to engage 61 older adults and/or their advocates in discussion and received 212 survey responses from older adults and caregivers. Throughout this process, HESSCO made efforts to encourage representation by consumers across racial and ethnic populations, from low-income older adults, and from socially isolated older adult populations. A full review of the methodology and results from the 2024 Needs Assessment Project are outlined in Attachment D.

The top ten concerns identified in our Needs Assessment Project, including input from focus group discussions and survey respondents, highlight our population's desire for support with the services and programs that will help them to age well in their chosen communities.

Needs Assessment Project Top Ten Reported Needs:

1. In-Home Support for Independence
2. Transportation Access
3. Access to Services
4. Access to Health Care
5. Affordable Health Care
6. Nutrition Support
7. Staying Active/Wellness Promotion
8. Leisure, Recreation, & Socialization
9. Housing Accessibility/Maintenance
10. Long-Term Services and Supports

In consideration of a growing aging population and the evolving needs of new generations of older adults, HESSCO is committed to developing a strategic four-year plan that remains flexible

and responsive to emerging challenges. Recognizing the necessity of adaptability, HESSCO has embedded agility into our planning process, ensuring we can pivot as new information arises. To fulfill our mission of supporting older adults with dignity, respect, and appropriate services to meet their individual needs, HESSCO embraces continuous innovation and reinvention. HESSCO also recognizes the need for continued outreach and connection with the voices of the older adults in our PSA and their caregivers and advocates. Though the formal needs assessment project is completed every four years in the process of Area Plan development, HESSCO has established systems to solicit feedback and input on an ongoing basis and at regular intervals throughout the duration of each Area Plan. From HESSCO's Board of Directors and Advisory Council members, whose memberships are comprised of at least 51% older adult representatives from the towns in our PSA, HESSCO has a direct line of communication to hear the consumer voice on an ongoing basis. In addition, HESSCO conducts consumer satisfaction surveys annually in many of its programs, collects input from staff working directly with consumers as needs are identified for individuals, and participates in community outreach activities where older adults, caregivers, and advocates can express any gaps in resource availability.

HESSCO has completed an in-depth review of available U.S. Census bureau data and population projections from the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) Donohue Institute Population Estimates Program. This provides HESSCO with a better understanding of the aging population with its PSA.

While overall, the HESSCO PSA has lower percentages of ethnic and racial minorities than the Commonwealth, HESSCO remains committed to ensuring that programs and services are designed to provide access to all residents and that efforts are made to improve access for older adults within ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities (See Table 1).

Table 1: Older Adults Age 60+ by Census Race						
Area	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Other Race	Two or more Races
HESSCO Area Total	91%	3%	0.001%	3%	1%	2%
Massachusetts Total (65+)	86%	4%	0.002%	4%	8.1%	-
<i>Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2020, prepared by University of Massachusetts-Boston Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging, and aggregated by AGE. Data Source: MA Healthy Aging Collaborative 2025 Data Reports by City/Town, accessed June 3, 2025</i>						

According to U.S. Census Data and projections from the UMASS Donohue Institute, the HESSCO PSA is projected to see population growth of individuals over age 60 from the 2020 Census numbers. All twelve towns within the HESSCO PSA will experience a growth rate of

their population over age 60 between five and twenty-seven percent by the end of this Area Plan timeframe (See Table 2, next page). When compared with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the HESSCO PSA will have an average rate of growth of individuals over the age of 60 higher than the state average.

Table 2: Age-Based Population Projections				
Area	Residents Age 60+ 2020 Census	Residents Age 60+ 2025 Projection	Residents Age 60+ 2030 Projection	Percent Change from 2020 to 2030 Projection
Canton	6,521	7,532	8,160	20.09%
Dedham	7,028	7,665	7,925	11.32%
Foxborough	4,651	5,453	5,793	19.71%
Medfield	2,804	3,218	3,266	14.15%
Millis	2,262	2,581	2,759	18.01%
Norfolk	2,695	3,118	3,241	16.85%
Norwood	8,303	9,367	9,967	16.70%
Plainville	2,555	3,117	3,520	27.41%
Sharon	4,564	4,848	4,792	4.76%
Walpole	6,416	7,291	7,736	17.06%
Westwood	4,232	4,754	5,154	17.89%
Wrentham	3,276	3,963	4,465	26.63%
HESSCO Area Total	55,307	62,907	66,778	17.18%
Massachusetts Total	1,702,555	1,913,655	2,022,435	15.82%
<i>Data Source: UMass Donahue Institute Vintage 2024 Population Projections. (UMDI V2024); accessed and percent change analysis completed by HESSCO 3/31/2025.</i>				

Taken together, this data and collected information from needs assessment activity provides the roadmap that is this HESSCO Area Plan on Aging 2026-2029. HESSCO will use this research throughout the duration of the Area Plan period to design programs, innovate, and respond to the needs of older adults within our PSA as they strive to age with dignity in the place and manner of their choosing.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Focus Area 1: Older Americans Act Core Programs

HESSCO has formulated goals and objectives based on the core programs of the Older Americans Act which form a foundation of the aging services network in our Program Service Area (PSA).

Goal: Ensure consumers receive clear, accessible information about available services and supports, empowering them to make informed decisions that best meet their needs.

Information and Referral (Title III B)

As the first point of contact for the majority of individuals served by our agency, it is critical that HESSCO's Information & Referral (I&R) department has the knowledge, tools, and resources necessary to provide comprehensive and tailored guidance for callers on a wide variety of subjects. To support this goal, HESSCO will dedicate resources to support and expand the ongoing training needs of the team. As new generations of older adults and individuals living with disabilities come forward with unique requests, our Information & Referral program will be responsive and adaptive to align our services with the support that is most useful to those seeking information. In looking at the I&R Call Trends for Federal Fiscal Year 2024 we see that nearly 87% of callers sought information about in-home services; this is echoed in our Needs Assessment Project where the majority of respondents reported in-home support to help maintain independence was their top priority and it was the need most often-cited by survey respondents.

To make the information and resources accessible to all who may need them, HESSCO provides multiple access points for these services including phone and email support during regular business hours, Monday-Friday 9:00am-5:00pm, as well as contracted live interpretation services available for callers with limited English proficiency. Leveraging use of technology to offer modern and accessible formats for individuals to connect with our services will be a priority.

Outreach

Raising awareness of HESSCO within the community is crucial to achieving our objective of providing aging-related information and resources to individuals within our PSA who will be impacted by the aging process—that is to say, everyone at one point or another. To achieve this, HESSCO will implement a comprehensive outreach strategy that focuses on expanding into areas where our presence is not yet established, strengthening and broadening our community partnerships, and reinforcing our visibility in familiar locations. A key priority will be identifying and engaging with underserved populations and communities to enhance access to essential resources.

Options Counseling

The Options Counseling program at HESSCO will continue to embrace a participant-directed, decision-support model. In this model, a consumer identifies their greatest areas of need and the HESSCO Options Counselor responds with information on the various possible programs and services available to meet those needs. Once informed of all options, the consumer can then

develop an informed decision as to where and how to access care and support, determining the mix of personal assistance supports and service providers that work best for them in the setting of their choice. This model allows the Options Counselor to connect people to the resources they need for their particular area of concern.

Serving Health Insurance Needs of Everyone (SHINE)

The SHINE program at HESSCO will continue to fully support a participant-directed model. With the overwhelming nature of health information out there and the decisions facing us all about enrollment and coverages, HESSCO strives to serve as a trusted and unbiased source of information to connect individuals with the information they need to make informed choices that will best align with their individual circumstance, and the support and advocacy to ensure that the consumer has the resources to implement their plan. When in need of advocacy or health insurance benefits review, a consumer works with a SHINE counselor to identify their needs. The SHINE counselor will research all options and inform the consumer of the full slate of possibilities. HESSCO has expanded outreach work in the PSA by partnering with the business community, especially those with large populations of individuals approaching retirement age, to provide on-site individual counselor support and education for larger groups about the process of Medicare enrollment, benefits and entitlements available, along with other resources as appropriate. Additional outreach efforts will be explored to ensure that individuals approaching Medicare enrollment periods have awareness of the SHINE program and the information needed to make informed choices.

Goal: Improve access and availability of transportation options across the program service area ensuring that consumers can get to the destinations that are important to them.

Transportation Services (Title III B)

HESSCO recognizes that transportation is a vital service that represents not a singular need but rather is connected to nearly every item represented in our Needs Assessment. Accessing services outside of the home of any kind from health care to socialization opportunities requires some form of transportation, and the impact of this need going unmet has rippling consequences.

Meeting transportation needs in our largely suburban PSA has long been a challenge. With limited funding and infrastructure to support these needs, our objective is to think creatively about how we can develop partnerships that attempt to bridge these gaps while seeking diversified funding supports to supplement the existing programs we offer. We will explore connecting current transportation providers with community partners to devise a cluster service schedule for popular destinations. Our existing Title III B funded transportation initiative with our partnered Councils on Aging (COA), whereby we charge the local COAs to determine local transportation needs for their area and funnel individual consumers whose needs fall outside of their provision of transportation services to HESSCO, will continue as the predominant mechanism we use to meet the needs for transportation in our PSA.

Continuing education with our staff and in the community on the availability of transportation services and entitlements under other programs such as MassHealth PT-1, MBTA's The Ride

and other public transportation routes, veterans services, volunteer programs, and private pay providers will also be a focus of our outreach and education efforts to address the need for transportation support for the population we serve.

Goal: Protect the rights of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers across the PSA and provide equal access to the justice system.

Legal Services (Title III B)

HESSCO recognizes the importance of access to legal advice and services regardless of ability to pay, and as such will continue its commitment to arrange for Legal Services across the PSA by working collaboratively with its sub-grantee. Focus areas for this work shall encompass the prevailing needs of the population as reviewed on a regular basis, with particular emphasis and ongoing support in the areas of housing, the need for planning documents, and consumer finance issues.

Ombudsman Program

HESSCO will continually strive to ensure that long-term care residents within its PSA access the Ombudsman Program for needed support. Through this program, operated by South Shore Elder Services for the HESSCO PSA, HESSCO will support advocacy for the rights of nursing and rest home residents and partner to resolve problems and improve care and quality of life. This program will assist residents in accessing the supports and services to return to their homes and communities when identified as a goal through the participant-directed process.

Goal: Prevent, detect, assess, intervene and/or investigate elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

Adult Protective Services

HESSCO will maintain its full support of the Adult Protective Services unit with staff dedicated to receive and investigate reports of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. This unit will connect at-risk community members to services and supports using person-centered service planning principles. HESSCO will provide training for the Adult Protective Services staff on trauma-sensitive practices, domestic violence, and financial exploitation, among others as needed.

HESSCO will maintain key relationships with financial institutions, medical professionals, and law enforcement that support a broad-based community response to elder abuse and financial exploitation. HESSCO will support local taskforces that involve municipalities and service providers that work together to resolve difficult situations emerging within the community.

Ensuring that vulnerable elders or elders who may be victims of abuse or neglect receive the services and supports they need will continue to be a high priority for HESSCO. The annual trainings for all agency staff will include an Adult Protective Services training in how to

recognize and report abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Community education programs on these topics will be provided as well.

Goal: Offer evidence-based healthy aging programs that support disease prevention and health promotion and support age-friendly community initiatives across the PSA.

Evidence-Based Programming (Title III D)

HESSCO will continue to support evidence-based healthy aging courses through its Title III D program. Health and wellness of the older adults within our PSA must remain a priority, and HESSCO is compelled to continue its efforts that will aim to address issues of chronic disease prevention and management through these educational programs, along with fall prevention and support for caregivers. HESSCO is currently offering Powerful Tools for Caregivers and will continue its goal of hosting at least two courses per year across the PSA, while continuing recruitment efforts for additional program leaders and class offerings.

Age-Friendly Communities

HESSCO has been a proponent of sparking Age-Friendly community organizing across its PSA. HESSCO chairs the Elder Care Alliance within the Neponset River Regional Chamber that has been instrumental in guiding Age Friendly efforts in Norwood and Dedham, and Dementia Friendly efforts in Sharon. Other communities have expressed interest and committed to devoting more resources in these areas as well, and HESSCO and the Elder Care Alliance will leverage community expertise in support of these efforts. HESSCO views its role to spark interest, organize community listening sessions, and foster community development of a stakeholder committee with clear goals and identified resources. HESSCO anticipates expanding these efforts across the PSA as community interest allows.

Focus Area 2: Greatest Economic Need and Greatest Social Need

Goal: Target vulnerable populations with specialized support and attention to encourage and facilitate participation in supporting programs and improve access to resources needed to foster improved social and health outcomes.

Housing Support

HESSCO has seen the benefits and direct impact to improved health and wellness outcomes through its two active and engaged Supportive Housing communities in the towns of Sharon and Norwood. This model of housing has successfully ensured access to services and supports that consumers need to remain independent in their community. Residents within these low-income housing developments have a dedicated Resident Services Coordinator located on-site at their housing development that offers vital support and access to information, resources, referrals, and assistance to a wide variety of benefits and programs to meet the needs of the residents. The availability of these services where individuals reside helps to reduce barriers like transportation and technology access while fostering community support amongst residents that continues long after business hours end. The addition of social and wellness programming enhances their community experience while combining education and social supports. HESSCO will continue

to support this housing model and advocate for more funded programs within the HESSCO PSA and Commonwealth.

HESSCO seeks to expand the supportive housing model with other housing entities, including private contracts with Local Housing Authorities and private property management companies to extend its portfolio of housing programs and partnerships. By leveraging the core Older Americans Act programs and Home Care Programs combined with Supportive Housing staff expertise, HESSCO can offer a managed system coordinating these services within the building on a scheduled basis. The goal is to improve resident access to these and other services through a concentrated effort collaborating with the property management, addressing tenancy preservation, and improved health and wellness outcomes for continued community living. HESSCO will continue these efforts to expand the options for these private models of supportive housing within our PSA.

Nutrition and Meal Support (Title III C)

HESSCO has always placed significant value in the Title III C meal support programs funded through the Older American's Act. Second to in-home services, the most frequent topic our callers asked about in review of the Federal Fiscal Year 2024 I&R Call Trends Report was nutrition. The Needs Assessment Project revealed that nutrition support was among the top priorities for respondents with nearly 43% marking it as a need for themselves or for their care recipient. In 2020, the demand for our Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program more than doubled due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdown of congregate meal programs and other supports individuals relied on to meet their nutritional needs. Those numbers have sustained over the five years since and our numbers have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. In the face of rising costs related to the production and delivery of our nutrition services and the funding gaps this program faces, we will need to evaluate every part of our nutrition program on a continual basis to reduce waste and maximize efficiency while looking for opportunities to diversify our funding streams to continue supporting this hallmark program at HESSCO.

HESSCO will continue to provide support to some of the most vulnerable older adults within our PSA, including those at increased risk of social isolation due to cultural identity, English-language proficiency, and other stigmatized and underserved identities. HESSCO will maintain a focus on providing meal support for the LGBTQIA+ community and South Asian meal programs. These programs provide an opportunity for vulnerable or isolated elders to both offer and receive social support, receive nutrition support from HESSCO, and provide an avenue for HESSCO to reach consumers in need of additional supports. As the population evolves over the next four years, HESSCO will review the need for additional congregate meal programs for other vulnerable or isolated populations.

Along with its congregate meals program, HESSCO continues to place high value on its home delivered meals program. This program promotes good nutrition and assists vulnerable homebound elders to maintain nutritional health. HESSCO will continue to consider this a priority program. HESSCO currently offers a hot noon-time meal delivered to homebound elders

in each town within the PSA, Monday through Friday. For those consumers who need additional meal support, HESSCO has available a frozen weekend meal, a cold evening meal, and breakfasts. In addition, HESSCO places high value on ensuring that the meal program meets both the health and cultural needs of individual consumers. Thus HESSCO offers therapeutic meals such as renal-diet appropriate meals, soft or pureed meals, as well as Kosher and vegetarian meals. This allows HESSCO to provide nutrition support in a manner that meets an individual's needs and preferences. In addition, HESSCO will continue to offer emergency shelf-stable meals to mitigate the risk to our consumers who cannot receive a home delivered meal during a weather-related emergency and will seek outside private financial support when needed for this program.

As a bridge between the congregate and home delivered meals program offerings, HESSCO operates a hybrid experience by connecting interested home delivered meal recipients via a virtual meeting during the noon-time meal so participants can share in the social aspect of a congregate meal site from the comfort of their homes while enjoying their nutritious home delivered meal. With real barriers to congregate meal site access like mobility impairments and lack of transportation, among others, our Remote Meal Site program brings a friendly visit into the homes of our program participants to address both their social and nutritional needs. For those who need technological support to join the program, HESSCO will provide devices, setup and connection support, as supply and funding allows. The Remote Meal Site is currently being offered once per week. HESSCO will look to expand this offering to additional days per week, incorporating marketing to unique populations such as caregivers, LGBTQIA+ communities, as interested parties and groups with specific needs are identified.

The HESSCO nutrition program will continue its longstanding commitment to the use and provision of fresh and local fruits and vegetables. HESSCO will distribute farmer's market coupons in each town through COAs, care managers, and Supportive Housing sites, and deliver fresh produce items to home delivered meal consumers.

HESSCO's Nutrition Director in partnership with the Registered Dietitian ensures that addressing malnutrition is a priority of the program. Our Dietitian offers Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) at select Councils on Aging (COA) across our PSA and to any Home Care consumer with concerns about their nutrition. Nutrition education programming at Supportive Housing sites and congregate meal sites is conducted throughout the year and placed on the back of monthly menus for both congregate and HDM participants. Our information & referral and care management teams screen for malnutrition risk factors and needs on an ongoing basis and make referrals to the nutrition program as necessary to support the needs of individual consumers.

Focus Area 3: Expanding Access to Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Goal: Ensure that consumers have access to a full complement of services to meet their care needs and support individual preferences.

Home Care Programs

During the Needs Assessment Project, the top identified need was the availability of services to help older adults remain in their home. HESSCO will continue to provide a strong focus on assessing eligibility for home and community-based services. HESSCO will also continue to provide service planning and care management for consumers who choose to develop a care plan that meets their individual needs. As a provider of state-funded Home Care Program services, HESSCO will offer eligible older adults the opportunity to develop a service package that may include but is not limited to the following types of services: homemaker, personal care, and home health services, adult day health, laundry services, personal emergency response systems, adaptive equipment, companion services, medication dispensing, home delivered meals, transportation, grocery shopping, chore services, vision rehabilitation, respite care, and habilitation therapy.

Within the assessment for home and community-based services, HESSCO will ensure a seamless referral to additional services needed for advocacy and more specialized support. HESSCO adopts the principles of person-centered care planning throughout all of its service planning activities. When a consumer is eligible for the state-funded Home Care Program, a Care Manager actively listens to the consumer's area of need and identifies for the consumer the services that may meet those needs, both that are available through the program as well as services that may not be included in the Home Care Program. The consumer is then able to develop a plan of care with the Care Manager.

HESSCO will also continue to provide staff support for the state-funded Consumer-Directed Care Program. With this program, the Care Manager acts more as a facilitator for the plan of care developed by the consumer. In addition, HESSCO will work with Personal Care Attendant Programs within the HESSCO PSA to ensure that consumers have access to this program that provides consumer choice and control over their service providers. Both programs support the principles of participant-directed care and person-centered planning, allowing consumers to determine the mix of personal assistance supports and service providers that work best for them.

Community Transitions

HESSCO will strive to improve transitions in care for consumers within the PSA through ongoing outreach and coordination with other service providers across the care continuum. HESSCO will continue to offer transition support services to individuals returning to the community from a hospital or nursing facility. This care transition program is a collaborative effort that includes the Community Transitions Liaison Program, Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, the Clinical Assessment and Eligibility Programs, and the Home Care Programs.

Focus Area 4: Caregiving

Goal: Understand the unique needs of family and informal caregivers to enhance HESSCO's ability to provide relevant and useful support to individuals in these roles that empowers person-centered decision making and holistic care of the caregiver and care recipient unit.

Caregiver Support (Title III E)

HESSCO's model for caregiver support is designed to address the unique needs of each caregiver by allowing them to direct the assessment and service planning process based on their highest priorities. This participant-driven approach enables the Caregiver Specialist to develop a service plan that is both person-centered and strengths-based. Additionally, HESSCO will tailor services to the individual caregiver, making referrals to relevant resources as specific needs are identified. The program will also emphasize the importance of self-care, providing caregivers with the tools and support needed to build resilience and alleviate stress.

Recognizing the balancing act most caregivers are faced with, HESSCO offers a virtual Caregiver Support Group. The virtual offering allows members with tight caregiving schedules, limited respite resources, without transportation, or facing other barriers of participation, a place they can find much-needed support. The HESSCO Caregiver Specialist acts as a facilitator for discussions that are participant-directed. Each participant is invited to share their concerns, successes, and elicit support and input from all group members. This model of peer support creates a judgement-free space to vent frustrations amongst others who have been in their shoes, commiserate about the burdens of caregiving, share best practices, provide inspiration, and generally support one another in both challenging and joyful times.

Community Engagement & Advocacy

As a recent report by AARP noted, nearly 73% of US workers are also caregivers. This large segment of the population has the shared experience of caregiving, but also many separate and individual needs. HESSCO will ensure we conduct active outreach into our communities to find subgroups of caregiving populations that may need specialized support or resources specific to their experience. From LGBTQIA+ caregivers or those caring for LGBTQIA+ older adults to grandparents raising grandchildren, caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's or related dementias to older adult caregivers of adult children with disabilities, all caregivers need caregiver support adapted to their unique and individual concerns.

HESSCO commits to leading advocacy efforts across the PSA to promote awareness for the contributions of informal and family caregivers, reduce stigma around seeking caregiver support, and encourage flexible workplace policies, within our own agency and with the broader community's businesses and organizations.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement

Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement are core HESSCO values and are an integral component of HESSCO's agency functions. HESSCO is committed to operating a program of continuous quality improvement. HESSCO has a dedicated Quality Improvement Manager who provides oversight, direction and coordination of all quality assurance and quality improvement efforts. HESSCO develops a Quality Improvement Plan each year that defines success for HESSCO programs and implements a measurement plan to assess achievement towards program goals. The Quality Improvement Committee at HESSCO is comprised of representatives from each of the Home Care, Nutrition, Planning and Community Development Departments and the Executive Director. The Quality Improvement Committee prioritizes performance objectives, develops measurement strategies and sets goals for improvement.

HESSCO employs the following tenets of performance measurement and quality improvement:

- Goals and objectives must be clearly identified and be measurable;
- Measure sets should include both process measures and outcome measures;
- Root cause analysis tools are used to identify issues;
- Rapid cycle improvement methodology such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) should be used to advance quality improvement objectives.

Consumer Satisfaction Surveys

HESSCO is committed to ensuring the satisfaction of the consumers it serves. For all facets of the services and programs it provides, HESSCO has a component of measuring consumer satisfaction. Some programs have surveys that are standardized across the Commonwealth for all Area Agencies on Aging and other programs have HESSCO generated surveys. HESSCO is committed to assessing consumer satisfaction for the following programs:

- Title III B Services including Legal Services and Transportation Services
- Title III C Nutrition Services
- Title III D Evidence-Based Education Programs
- Title III E Family Caregiver Services
- SHINE Program Services
- ASAP Purchased Services (in-home care)
- ASAP Case Management Services
- Supportive Housing Program Services

These survey results are coordinated through the Quality Improvement Manager annually. They are used to assess HESSCO performance and identify areas for improvement and/or program development. These surveys are an important way for HESSCO to hear from its most important stakeholders, the older adults it serves.

Attachment A: Area Agency on Aging, 2025 Needs Assessment Project and Public Input to Area Plan on Aging

State Guidance

The Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) requires each Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to undertake a needs assessment process every four years as part of the development of the Area Plan on Aging. The AGE guidance requires each AAA to conduct outreach activities to capture representative opinions and input from the older adults and caregivers in the Program Service Area (PSA). AAAs were asked to identify 5-8 categories reflecting the diverse identities of the PSA and to engage individuals in each category. Surveys provided by AGE were a required component of the Needs Assessment process, along with optional focus groups. All outreach activities needed to target individuals with the greatest social need and greatest economic need.

HESSCO Activities

HESSCO completed five focus groups across the Program Service Area (PSA) to meet directly with older adults and/or their advocates. These activities took place between October 1 and December 1, 2024 and took place either in-person or virtually. These provided opportunities for HESSCO to ask questions directly of older adults and their advocates to explore their concerns, ideas, and priorities. They followed a standard format that included:

- Introductions of facilitators and members and reason for meeting;
- Explanation of the role of the Area Agency on Aging and the Area Plan on Aging;
- Discussion of areas of priority for older adults and concerns faced by older adults in the Program Service Area;
- Explanation for how information will be used and shared.

The table below identifies the date of each listening session, the population invited, and the mode of communication. These efforts reached a total of 61 older adults and/or their advocates through direct conversation and sharing of information and ideas.

Date of Event	Population Invited/Host	Mode of Communication
October 8, 2024	HESSCO Advisory Council Members/HESSCO	Virtual
October 9, 2024	HESSCO Board of Directors/HESSCO	Virtual
October 17, 2024	Caregivers/HESSCO Virtual Caregiver Support Group	Virtual
October 21, 2024	LGBTQIA+ adults/Sharon Council on Aging	In-Person
October 29, 2024	HESSCO Staff members/HESSCO	In-Person

HESSCO also targeted ten groups to survey, along with broader surveying efforts, to reach additional older adults across the PSA. Multiple language translations were available for surveys, and HESSCO utilized the Russian and Chinese translations, two languages identified by HESSCO staff as spoken by older adults receiving the survey. All surveys included a QR code and online survey submission option along with physical collection methods for paper survey returns either by mail or at a centralized drop-off location, such as the Council on Aging hosting the group and the Supportive Housing offices within the housing developments surveyed. The efforts as outlined in the table below garnered responses from 212 older adults between October 1 and December 1, 2024.

Survey Target Group (estimated recipients)	Survey Distribution Details
Residents of Low-Income Senior Housing in Sharon and Norwood (260)	Survey distributed by HESSCO's Supportive Housing Coordinators with stamped, return envelopes available and central collection box on site
Recipients of Home Delivered Meals (700)	Survey distributed to all Home Delivered Meals recipients with stamped, return envelope included
Participants of the Chinese Elders Group at Sharon Council on Aging (50)	Translated surveys distributed during monthly meeting and additional surveys provided to group members to provide to others not present, collection available at COA
Attendees of HESSCO's annual Age Well Conference (250)	Surveys provided in conference attendee packets with options for online submission, collection day of the conference, or mail-in options
Participants of the LGBTQIA+ Monthly Luncheon at Sharon Council on Aging (100)	Survey distributed via email to all prior luncheon attendees as well as in person at the monthly luncheon event in October 2024
Participants of the South Asian Monthly Luncheon at Sharon Council on Aging (150)	Survey distributed via email to all prior luncheon attendees as well as in person at the monthly luncheon event in October 2024
Provider Contacts and Event Sponsors (300)	Survey distributed via email to all HESSCO contracted providers for all services, prior event sponsors, community partners, and other contacts doing business directly with HESSCO
Networking Group Listservs (250)	Survey distributed via email to memberships of several aging services networking groups, including the Elder Care Alliance and Elder Service Providers Groups
HESSCO Volunteers (600)	Survey distributed via email to all active HESSCO volunteers
HESSCO Caregiver Support Group Contacts and caregiver newsletter recipients (500)	Survey distributed via email to HESSCO's Caregiver Support Group participants
All older adults within the Program Service Area (7,000+)	Survey distributed digitally through social media, HESSCO's website, and HESSCO's monthly newsletter

The qualitative and quantitative results of these listening sessions and surveys were evaluated at HESSCO to determine the priorities of older adults within the PSA. In addition, HESSCO completed analysis of available community health data, census data, satisfaction surveys of HESSCO services, and call topics and trends within the Information and Referral Department of HESSCO. The Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) provided AAA specific reports with area demographic data, survey results, along with statewide data and survey results.

Quantitative Results:

The top ten priorities identified by the 212 surveys received by HESSCO are:

1. In-Home Support for Independence (59%)
2. Transportation Access (46.7%)
3. Access to Services (46.2%)
4. Access to Health Care (45.8%)
5. Affordable Health Care (44.8%)
6. Nutrition Support (42.5%)
7. Staying Active/Wellness Promotion (41.5%)
8. Leisure, Recreation, and Socialization (39.6%)
9. Housing Accessibility and Maintenance (38.2%)
10. Long-Term Services and Supports (38.2%)

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of the five listening sessions/focus groups conducted by HESSCO reflected similar priorities as survey results, and elicited the following priorities:

- Ensuring Older Adults Know Who to Call When Help is Needed;
- Services to Support Older Adults Remaining at Home;
- Addressing Financial Needs of Older Adults;
- Advocacy for Older Adults Across Communities.

Statements of Need and Priorities

HESSCO used the information elicited from these qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify these eight statements of need and priorities for the older adults within the HESSCO PSA.

- Ensure consumers receive clear, accessible information about available services and supports, empowering them to make informed decisions that best meet their needs.

- Improve access and availability of transportation options across the program service area ensuring that consumers can get to the destinations that are important to them.
- Protect the rights of seniors, people with disabilities, and caregivers across the PSA and provide equal access to the justice system.
- Prevent, detect, assess, intervene and/or investigate elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.
- Offer evidence-based healthy aging programs that support disease prevention and health promotion and support age-friendly community initiatives across the PSA.
- Target vulnerable populations with specialized support and attention to encourage and facilitate participation in supporting programs and improve access to resources needed to foster improved social and health outcomes.
- Ensure that consumers have access to a full complement of services to meet their care needs and support individual preferences.
- Understand the unique needs of family and informal caregivers to enhance HESSCO's ability to provide relevant and useful support to individuals in these roles that empowers person-centered decision making and holistic care of the caregiver and care recipient unit.

Future Outreach Targets

HESSCO's goal with the surveying portion of the needs assessment process was to receive 250 returned survey responses. To increase response rates in future outreach efforts, HESSCO has identified additional target populations, including input received during the public comment period. Outreach efforts will begin to communities identified across the PSA housed in mobile home/trailer park developments that may have higher proportions of 55+ older adults, along with other types of public and private housing developments across the PSA with high percentages of older adult populations. Additionally, increased partnership and integration with Councils on Aging (COA) groups, including COA boards, affinity groups connecting through COAs, and events generating large group gatherings will be targeted as connection points to build bridges for increased participation in efforts to solicit feedback in future efforts.

Exploring partnerships with area cultural organizations to help promote intergenerational programming and services will also be an effort of targeted outreach over the next fiscal year, such as connecting LGBTQIA+ community organizations with HESSCO's existing LGBTQIA+ lunch program, identifying cultural community groups in the PSA who are currently serving or who may be open to expanding service to the older adult population such as through religious and/or spiritual congregations, and leveraging established relationships with businesses and other organizations in the PSA to connect with caregivers in the workforce.

Public Review of Area Plan

HESSCO published its draft Area Plan narrative on June 6th and posted to its website an invitation for public review and comment for a period of 30 days, closing on July 6th.

Advertisements across social media platforms and emailed newsletters were sent to community partners, consumers, caregivers, volunteers, donors, and other interested parties. Printed copies were made available for review at HESSCO's office, including a large print version. A public listening session and discussion was held in partnership with HESSCO's Advisory Council meeting on June 17th at Plainville Council on Aging where approximately 20 people attended.

HESSCO's Board of Directors and Advisory Council were integral throughout the Area Plan development process, starting with the needs assessment through the public review and comment period. Feedback from the Board and Advisory groups helped to guide the development of the Area Plan's goals and strategies as voices of older adults and advocates across the PSA.

Three formal written comments were received from members of the public during the public review period. All comments received were reviewed by the Director of Planning & Community Development and discussed with HESSCO's Senior Management team. While all comments and feedback were appreciated and helped to shed light on the perspectives and areas of need for particular individuals, the comments received did not demonstrate the need for substantive change to the Area Plan as written. Input received from commenters will be incorporated into outreach strategies moving forward, as appropriate, and highlighted additional opportunities for education about services and supports available through HESSCO's many programs. Each commenter was contacted directly with an individualized response to address their specific questions and concerns.

Views of older adults, individuals with disability, caregivers, advocates, and community stakeholders form the basis of HESSCO's Area Plan development, and while the formal process is conducted every four years, HESSCO makes a commitment to continuous engagement with these populations to ensure the needs of consumers remain at the forefront of the agency's priorities and goals.