



NORTHEAST IOWA Area Agency on Aging

Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging – NEI3A

by Connie Cherba

The Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging, known as NEI3A, is a private, not-for-profit corporation that serves older individuals living in 18 counties in Northeast Iowa. NEI3A carries out its mission, to “empower older individuals to age with dignity and independence,” by focusing on improving the lives of older Iowans, their caregivers, and their communities through efforts to supply support, information, and services that enable aging at home.

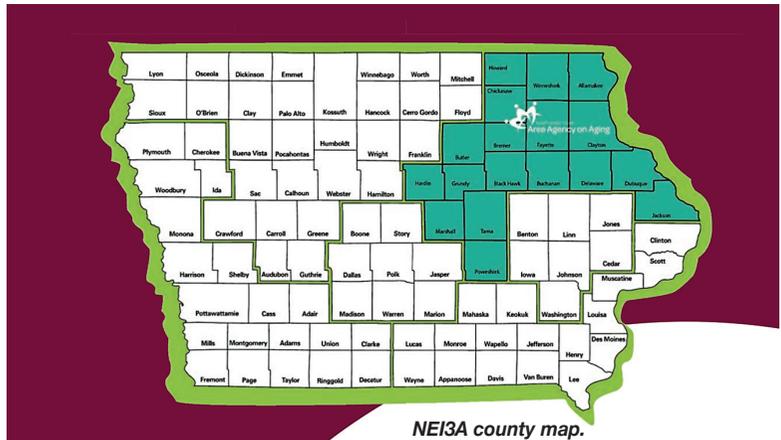
There is no doubt that Iowa’s population, like that of the United States, is living longer than ever. Estimates say that by 2030, one in five or 73 million people living in the United States will be 65 or older. In 74 out of Iowa’s 99 counties, at least 20% of the residents will be 65 or older. NEI3A serves that population in Dubuque County along with those living in: Allamakee, Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Chickasaw, Clayton, Delaware, Fayette, Grundy, Hardin, Howard, Jackson, Marshall, Poweshiek, Tama, and Winneshiek Counties.

“In the state of Iowa, there are 500,000 individuals between 60 and 75 and 250,000 people 75 and older,” said Mike Donohue, NEI3A CEO.



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NEI3A CEO.

“What we are seeing is that 25% of the people we serve today live below the poverty level. Almost half of the people 60 years and above in our 18 counties live in rural settings and half live alone. The



NEI3A county map.
Photos contributed by NEI3A.

combination of growing poverty and a rural setting is going to challenge us to be even more creative in terms of how we connect with these people and get services to them so at the end of the day we can fulfill our mission.”

“What we do is driven and dictated by the 1965 Older Americans Act,” said Mike. “That established area agencies on aging across the country. Dubuque’s Scenic Valley, Northeast Iowa, and Hawkeye Valley were the three AAAs [Area Agencies on Aging] that served the 18 counties and then they merged five or six years ago to become part of NEI3A.” In FY 2020, NEI3A received funding totaling more than \$8.5 million, including \$2.6 million from the Federal Older Americans Act, \$1.6 million from state general funds, \$2 million from competitive grants, and the remainder from participant contributions, Medicaid, United Way, and federal COVID funding.

The agency’s primary goal is to help the aging population maintain independence through services that include

meal and nutrition programs, health and wellness programs, caregiver support and respite services, care management, advocacy, and counseling and education programs.

In 2020, NEI3A assisted 6,621 individuals with information, programs, and services including:

Nutrition Services – A program that provides access to nutritious meals. When the pandemic hit, NEI3A shut down their 43 congregate meal sites in mid-March 2020 and concentrated on home-delivered meals which took the form of weekly, frozen meal boxes in order to reduce exposure. In 2020, some 249,893 meals were delivered throughout the 18-county coverage area. Plans call for resuming congregate meal sites in June. For rural areas without meal sites, the agency is exploring the feasibility of partnering with local restaurants in order to make nutritious meals more accessible.

“The gateway to our consumers is typically nutrition,” said Mike. “Our mission programming covers congre-

gate meals in addition to home-delivered meals. So we start there, do an intake, and we discover other support services they need – all solely focused on keeping them independent and making sure they can age with dignity.”

Health and Wellness Programs – Programs designed to support healthy aging through exercise and nutrition. Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention, one of the most popular classes, offers instruction on breathing, mindfulness, balance, and strength training. Other exercise programs include Seniors in Motion, offered in partnership with the YWCA, and A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls.

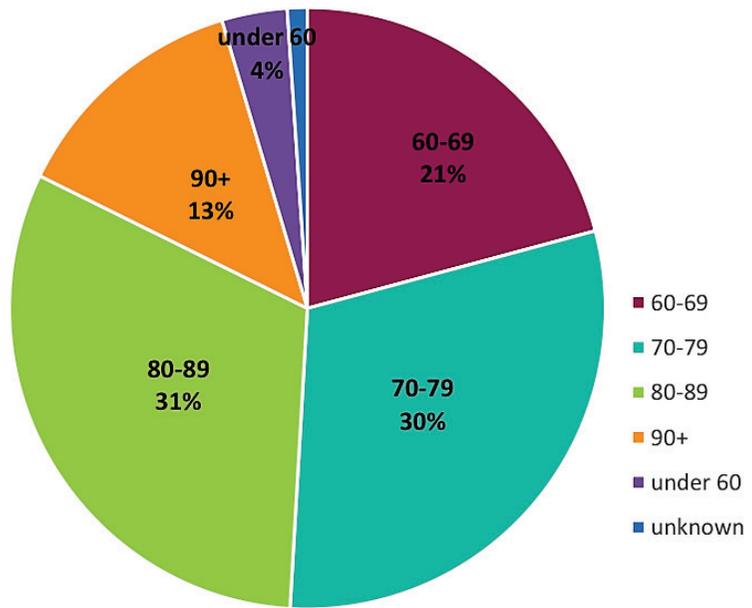
Other programs include Fresh Conversations and the Home Meds Program. Fresh Conversations, a monthly, nutritional education program offered in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health, provides samples of new recipes and ingredients. The Home Meds Program offers medicine education to help prevent misunderstanding and misuse of medications that might cause medication-related issues such as falls, dizziness, heart problems, or confusion.

Caregiver Support Services – Services designed to support caregivers with education, resources, and counseling. In 2020 in the United States, 43.5 million informal, unpaid caregivers cared for an adult or child – often times while working and caring for children of their own. Last year, NEI3A supported 483 clients with support groups, two caregiver conferences focusing on burnout and stress, and access to respite services.

To help with the challenges of increased isolation during the pandemic, NEI3A launched the GrandPad program and distributed 50, easy-to-use tablets that allow clients in the caregiver program to stay connected with loved ones through a video call.

“We were battling social isolation before the pandemic,” said Mike. “All of our in-home visits shut down and our congregate meal sites shut down. We had to get creative with technology. The GrandPads are a piece of technology we put into place for both caregivers and consumers. They are programmed for older persons and are very intuitive to use. It’s been very important to connect people in a time we couldn’t get together. Once we do get back into homes, I’m sure we’re going to discover a level of mental health issues we can’t even comprehend.”

NEI3A Consumers by Age



Annual Report FY 2020. Contributed by NEI3A.

One of the most important goals of NEI3A is to help older Iowans live safely, with dignity and respect. To accomplish this, the agency supports:

Person Centered Funding – A philosophy that supports a comprehensive care management program designed to remove barriers to independence. NEI3A Aging Specialists work with individuals and their families to identify specific needs in order to develop a care plan, locate available resources, and find funding to address the needs. Last year, 430 people were assisted with case management, home modifications and repairs including access ramps, chores, and transportation.

Elder Abuse and Prevention Awareness – An effort to address elder abuse and mistreatment which affects about 1 in 10 older Americans. Mistreatment can be physical or mental abuse, financial exploitation, or even neglect. This program promotes public awareness, helps identify vulnerable adults and victims, and offers strategies and resources to intervene and stop the abuse.

Legal Assistance – Offered in partnership with Iowa Legal Aid and in order to help people with legal issues including housing and rent disputes,

guardianship and conservatorship concerns, and medical claim appeals.

Older Worker Employment Program (OWEP) – A grant program overseen by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) and designed to support clients who are 55 and older, have a documented disability, and are looking for employment by assisting with resumes, interview skills, and job applications.

NEI3A and its predecessors have been assisting Iowa seniors for more than 50 years, and despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic, the agency has continued to serve the elderly population of Northeast Iowa. “I think the agency is one of the best kept secrets because most people just think of us as Meals on Wheels,” said Mike. “Yes, nutrition is the biggest part of our budget, but it’s so much more than that – significant caregiver and respite support, education about elder abuse, health-based programs, and more. The impact is just amazing.”

If you have questions about a loved one, a neighbor, or yourself, contact NEI3A at: 1-800-779-8707.