State Advisory Council on Aging

2012 Annual Report
to the
Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging

Technology and Older Adults

Commissioner Anthony Pawelski, Chairperson

May 2012

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF SERVICES TO THE AGING
LANSING

KARI SEDERBURG
DIRECTOR

April 9, 2012

Dear Chairperson Kennedy and Fellow Commissioners:

I am very pleased to transmit the 2012 Annual Report of the State Advisory Council on Aging. In the spring of 2011, the Commission asked the State Advisory Council on Aging (SAC) to look at technology use among older adults.

Since then, the Council has looked at technology use from a variety of perspectives and is pleased to offer this report.

In addition to working on our charge, Council members have contributed to other issues and topics over the past two years. Council members have been involved in the following activities/groups:

- the "Communities for a Lifetime" recognition review panel
- the Department of Community Health's Advisory Council on Mental Illness and its Recovery Council
- the Commission's bylaw review committee
- the Creating Confident Caregivers Master Trainer review panel

On behalf of the Council, I wish to express our thanks to Director Kari Sederburg and the staff of the Office of Services to the Aging for their assistance and support. I'm grateful to Commissioners Kennedy, Newport, and Sheehan for attending Council meetings. Finally, thanks to the Commission for allowing me the opportunity to work with State Advisory Council on Aging. The Council deeply appreciates your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Anthony Pawelski
Chairperson, State Advisory Council

AP/scs

2012 ANNUAL REPORT
STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON AGING

Technology and Aging

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To fulfill the charge assigned by the Commission on Services to the Aging (CSA), the State Advisory Council (SAC) gathered information from various sources about technology use among older adults. In last year's summary, the SAC presented research on internet use conducted by the Pew Research Center.[1] According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project[2]

- Americans aged 50+ are the fastest growing new users of social media and new communications;
- Between April 2009 and May 2010, social networking use among internet users aged 50-64 grew by 88%--from 25% to 47%;
- During the same period, use among those ages 65 and older grew 100%--from 13% to 26%.

The 2011 Pew Internet report focused on the use of social media, e.g., Facebook, Linked In. Respondents were ages 18 and above and all were already online.

In February 2012, the Pew Internet project conducted a survey of who is online and issued a chart[3]. The percentage drops as age increases: 94% of people age 18-29 report being online with a drop to 48% for those aged 65 and older.

A 2011 U.S. Department of Commerce study[4] reported 68% of all households have broadband, but only 45% of older householders (65+) have broadband. There are several factors, such as rural, income, and education. However, older adults appear to be part of the third of all Americans who are not online.

The Commission on Services to the Aging is interested in knowing about the "digital divide" among older adults in Michigan. The SAC looked at internet/technology use in three areas:

1. Access to computers and support for older adults offered by senior centers;
2. Computer/technology programs offered by area agencies on aging; and
3. Individual computer use of and devices among older Michiganians.

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[1] Older Adults and Social Media: Social networking use among those ages 50 and older nearly doubled over the past year, Mary Madden, Senior Research Specialist, August 27, 2010.

[2] Full report at http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx

[3] Available at http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx

[4] Full report at http://www.esa.doc.gov/Reports/exploring-digital-nation-computer-and-internet-use-home.

In 2010, the SAC received presentations from several senior centers around the state about the computer resources and technology support they offer older adults. In 2011, the SAC invited area agencies on aging (AAAs) to present their technology activities and those in their region. One outstanding program was the "reverse mentoring" program that paired a member of the Wyoming Teen Center with an older person to help with computer skills. SAC members provided a picture of the growing number of publicly accessible computers, from libraries to senior housing apartment buildings and community centers, as they looked at their communities.

While access to community online resources appears to be within reach of many seniors, there appears to be other factors that contribute to whether or not an individual uses a computer, smartphone, or other device. The SAC proposed conducting a survey of older adults in September 2011. Older adult refers to someone aged 50 and above, since we wanted to capture the range including the baby boomer generation. It was decided the survey would be active from mid-October to early January, 2012. The survey gathered responses from more than 1,500 older adults around the state.

Recommendation: Three factors contribute to use of digital technology by older adults: access to broadband; education/support; and cost. According to several studies, people tend to have a positive experience in using the internet to connect with others and gather information when these barriers are eliminated.

These factors cut across the state, community, and individual use of digital technology. Access to broadband begins with the state, involves the community, and finally, is used by the individual. The need for computer training is essential while the cost of hardware, software, and broadband access is a significant barrier for those on limited incomes.

Based on the ever-increasing importance of digital technology, the SAC recommends the following actions to address these factors.

State level:
- Convene a Tech Summit
  - Partner with Governor's Office to address this issue
  - Invite technology industry providers, bankers, hospital/ health care providers and others interested in expanding broadband access
  - Examine older adults' use of technology and older adult friendly products.
  - Engage key organizations, technology providers, and policy makers in a discussion of Michigan's broadband needs in the future, with a focus on the older population
  - Explore the idea of developing a tax incentive to encourage support of senior tech market

- o Support legislation and policy changes that will increase older adult access to broadband
- Conduct survey again in three years

Community:
- Encourage community collaboration
  - o Community collaboration between public/private organizations and non-profits, volunteer programs will increase a community's livability for all ages
  - o Community resources, such as public libraries and senior centers, are often lacking sufficient resources to meet the growing demand for access by households without broadband or computers
  - o Increase awareness of local/state/federal opportunities to promote senior access to products and services
- Encourage the aging network to continue to use non-digital methods for reaching older adults
  - o Since internet use appears to be dependent on factors such as income and education, the aging network must provide information in non-digital form

Individual:
- Develop toolkit of best practices for increasing access and support for older adults including collaboration, programs for people with disabilities and non-English speaking persons.
  - o Older learners have distinct needs. Successful programs that support older adults should be recognized and replicated
- Explore changes in assistive technology for people of all ages with disabilities
  - o High tech
  - o Low tech

State Advisory Council Meeting Summary

April 2011 (teleconference): Commissioner Sheehan presented computer resources at the Traverse City Senior Center and Cherie Wisdom, Director of the Meridian Senior Center, Okemos, presented computer resources at the center.

August 2011: Anne Ellermets of Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan presented technology resources in Region 8. Presentations described the Wyoming Senior Center, Mecosta County Commission on Aging, United Methodist Community House, Grand Rapids Community College Older Learner Center, Evergreen Commons, and the Wyoming Teen Center's "reverse mentoring" program.

September 2011: Aimee Sterk, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, discussed the initiative with Michigan's Area Agencies on Aging on assistive technology for older adults. Richard Martin of Area Agency on Aging IV presented their Senior Net program. SAC technology survey reviewed. It was decided that the survey time frame is Oct.15 through Dec. 15.

November 2011: Norm DeLisle, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, presented assisted technology for cognitive losses. Carol Barrett gave a progress report on the SAC survey.

January 2012 (Teleconference): Carol Barrett gave a preliminary report on the SAC survey.

March 2012: Carol Barrett gave a presentation on the survey. The Council developed its recommendation and discussed the report.

Technology and Older Adults

The aging population is growing at a phenomenal rate and Michigan is part of the equation. Michigan has
- 1.9 million older adults aged 60 and older
- 175,000 are at the poverty level (10%)
- In 2011, the first wave of baby boomers turned 65 years old
- By 2029, the entire baby boom generation will be age 65 and older

The "digital divide" refers to the gap between people who use computers/digital devices and those who don't. Often, young people are the focus in discussions about people who are not online or using computers. Digital devices play a key role in school, job hunting, and employment opportunities.

However, there is a growing reliance on computer/digital devices to transmit health and medical information, medical records/appointments, banking, news, weather, and other resources. For example,
- Libraries provide computers, but encourage you to renew books online
- Doctors see you in person, but send emails confirming your appointment
- Stores have sales and promotional coupons only available through email, online, or internet shopping
  - Last November, "Black Friday" was followed by "Cyber Monday" with online sales
- Travel agents have been replaced by travel websites
- Employment and volunteer opportunities now require computer skills

In 2010-11, we found many senior centers provide free or low cost classes on using computer and computerized devices. Local differences exist as to the range of technology assistance provided.

For example,
- some have teams of electronic gamers who compete with other senior center teams, while others find their games sit idle;
- some provide classes on a variety of skills: social media, photo shop, digital cameras; and
- some use MySeniorCenter, a software program that uses key cards to register, attend, and track participation of senior center participants
  - These centers noted that using the MySeniorCenter was one step in integrating the digital world for many older adults

All centers that presented had some digital program instruction or resources to assist older adults in gaining skills and all seemed responsive to the needs of their participants.

In September, 2010, SAC did a self-survey of members present and technology used.

- More people have a cell phone than have a computer
  - Cell phones, "smart" or not, are viewed as security and a safety device
  - A recent Nielsen survey (March 2012) showed that smart phone use, while strongly linked to income, is also growing faster than expected among people age 65+
- Nearly all SAC members use computers, have e-mail accounts and use the internet
- About a third of SAC members texted and some had Twitter accounts
- About a third of SAC members had Facebook accounts, some use Linked In
- While some members didn't have or use a computer or other digital device, some had several: GPS, smartphone, netbook, I-pad, etc.

As they discussed the various forms of technology they used and three groups emerged.
- There were the "early adopters/devotees" of digital devices
  - They used computers and digital devices regularly and relied on them
- There were members who used digital devices, but sometimes uneasily
  - They viewed them as useful, but worried about security, privacy, and the time required
- There were some non-digital device users
  - These members did not use, own, or want a computer

In September 2011, the SAC decided to conduct a survey of technology use among older adults. A simple, multiple choice form with14 questions was developed. Originally envisioned as a slightly larger convenience sample of SAC members and friends, the form, even in its early draft, was picked up, publicized by the media, and sent around. Soon responses from all over Michigan were arriving at the Office of Services to the Aging. Several hundred responses came from the on-line survey and even more were received in hard copies.

Information from respondents to the Technology and You survey conducted November-December 2011, indicate the following findings.

People who "can't imagine being without their computer/smartphone/laptop" share their enthusiasm about the benefits of being digitally connected. Like several SAC members, they use it all: smartphones, Facebook, Linked In, video chats, electronic books, and GPS/navigation devices. These devices are praised for their effectiveness, efficiency, and ease. People "text" friends and video chat with relatives around the world. These

devices are high tech assistive technology, helping people perform basic tasks and enhancing performance in others.

Some of those surveyed used computers and cell phones, yet they had concerns about mobile devices such as smartphones, I-pad, and lap tops, stating they had no use or interest in being in "instant contact" with people.

Survey respondents also cited costs of the devices. The newest devices are the most expensive, monthly fees are required, and the upgrades can be costly. Some devices present real security risks and identity theft and loss of privacy were cited as concerns. Finally, the issue of time was raised. Some members felt that time spent on social media was "wasted." Several cited social media programs as harmful. Members discussed the replacement of real activity with digital activity, e.g. exercise on a treadmill vs. playing Wii. Some see email as a "forced" necessity.

People are very aware of identity theft, hacked credit cards, and infected computers that slow down performance or "eat" all your files. Computers present great opportunities, with significant risks. Mass media, both news and advertising, cite risks daily. Privacy, security, and keeping resources safe are concerns shared by everyone, regardless of age.

As many agencies know, older adults can learn computer skills, but acquiring those skills takes time. Like other skills, practice improves performance, so considerable time can be spent seated at a computer.

Finally, there are those who don't need or want computers or digitally devices. Some older adults, including SAC members, cited a concern about time and how it's spent. Several surveys came back with "no computer" written on them and a few with "I hate technology." For some, "an answering machine is all I need."

In 2011-12, the SAC received information about computer training from area agencies on aging (AAAs).
- Some offered computer classes as part of their senior employment training program
- Some encouraged caregivers to connect digitally through computer labs
- Others provided intergenerational links, such as using high school students to tutor older adults on programs, software and internet use
- All AAAs have a website, but don't rely in electronic communication to reach older adults

Overview: The SAC cited several issues that need to be addressed before everyone who wants to be connected digitally can be.

First issue is broadband access. The federal and state governments are seeking to increase broadband access into rural areas of states. Broadband is different from the wireless connections used by phones and its capacity to transmit data and connections is superior to the "wi-fi" used by cellular phones or the typical "dial up" connection to the internet found in many rural areas of the U.S.

While some studies and survey respondents cited the proliferation of smartphones as an option to computers, it's unclear whether a smartphone is equivalent to broadband, as they use different technology platforms.

Next, the costs associated with digital technology use are a concern. While smartphone use is increasing among older adults, the recent Nielsen survey of smartphone users (January 2012) shows that across all ages, those with incomes above $100K are the highest group of users, including those age 65+. While 56% of those age 18-24 with incomes of less than $15,000 have smartphones, only 16% of those age 65+ with the same income have them.

Many SAC members mentioned the experience of buying new devices only to be faced with costly tech support, software upgrades or device obsolescence. Maintenance is expensive and the marketing cycle for digital products is rapid. Changes can be substantial. Without resources to update equipment or programs, people become frustrated.

Clearly, income plays a role. Retirees who had tech support while working can find maintaining their home computer challenging. Finding low cost tech support in the free market can be even more difficult.

Computers at senior centers, libraries, and other public locations, e.g., community centers, apartment buildings, etc., are very valuable.
- They relieve the person of the expenses of owning a computer;
- They tend to have sophisticated privacy and security programs designed for a public setting, and
- Technical support is provided.

In some areas, the SAC noted that these resources may be reduced by spending cuts. The SAC supports publicly accessible computers for people of all ages.

Finally, people with disabilities may not know or can't afford high tech devices that would assist them. Visual acuity and ability to use a keyboard are often taken for granted; however, several respondents to the survey cited one or more of these as the

reason they don't have or use a computer. The SAC had presentations from the Michigan Disabilities Right Coalition (MDRC) on the array of high and low tech devices that assist a person with disabilities. The SAC supports the MDRC's efforts to share this information with the aging network in support of older adults' independence.

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