



Trending Healthy

December 2023



Ring in the New

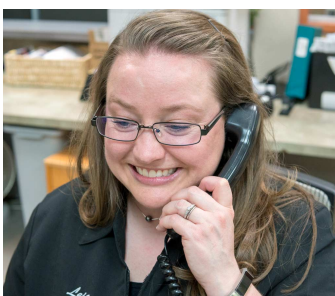
The holidays can be full of joy, a time for reflection, a sad time for those missing loved ones, a time to enjoy long-standing traditions or create new ones, and much more. Join us in saying goodbye to 2023 and welcoming in 2024, with all of its promise and hope for a good year to come!

Happy Holidays



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Are you looking for services for older adults and caregivers?

Call us or stop by!

Clallam County:

Forks Office (360) 374-9496

Sequim Office (360) 452-3221

Grays Harbor County:

Aberdeen Office (360) 532-0520

Jefferson County:

Port Townsend Office (360) 385-2552

Pacific County:

Long Beach Office (360) 642-3634

Raymond Office (360) 942-2177

Or visit our website: www.O3A.org

****KUDOS!** Nancy Gorshe, O3A Advisory Council Member, Honored**

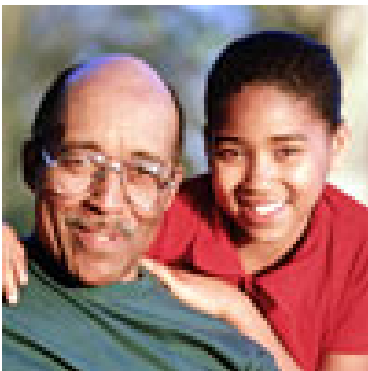
Nancy Gorshe was recently awarded the Ben Lindekugel Governance Excellence Award for her work

on behalf of rural healthcare. Gorshe, an O3A Advisory Council member representing Pacific County, received the award from the Washington State Hospital Association during its annual meeting.



"Nancy is a committed leader who has helped guide major improvements to health care in Southwest Washington," said Scott Attridge, Ocean Beach Hospital CEO. Gorshe has served on the Ocean Beach Hospital Board of Commissioners for 12 years.

Congratulations, Nancy! We appreciate your advocacy and efforts to improve rural healthcare.



New Kinship Care Navigator Joins O3A

Helping grandparents and other family members raising children

We're pleased to announce that our new Kinship Care Navigator, Aaron Hamm, is on board and ready to help families raising relatives' children to learn about and access resources. "This is one aspect of family caregiving," said Laura Cepoi, O3A's Executive Director. "More grandparents and other relatives are raising children, and they need support. This position provides an entry point for them to find resources."

Hamm added that the program also assists "fictive kin"--the term for chosen family, or people who are not biologically or legally related but who assume a familial role.

"We're here to help them navigate the complex system to best meet their child's needs," he said. That help could take the form of referrals to other programs, assistance with guardianship or adoption, or short-term financial help, for instance.

Hamm was most recently a Case Manager in O3A's Raymond office. He will be working out of the Aberdeen office but providing services to all four counties in O3A's service region (Jefferson, Clallam, Grays Harbor, and Pacific Counties). You can contact him at 360.538.8870.

Elliq Artificial Intelligence, Real Connection

I recently got voicemails from two of our Elliq users reporting that their Elliqs weren't working properly after their wifi service was interrupted. This was an easy fix for the customer service team at Intuition Robotics, the makers of Elliq, and both were back online quickly. But what was interesting was that both of their messages said, "I miss her."



When we were starting up the pilot project and explaining to people that we wanted to test this new AI (Artificial Intelligence) companion robot for some of our older adults who lived alone and were feeling lonely, many of them were skeptical. They didn't believe a robot could provide any meaningful companionship. But we watched videos and listened to podcasts of Elliq users around the country and were struck by how emotional their connections were, and by the fact that they all referred to Elliq as "her," not "it."

Elliq was very thoughtfully designed to have a supportive, compassionate female persona, and users respond to her much as they would to a real person. She also adapts over time to their patterns and preferences; that's

what AI does, “learning” as it goes. One user compared ElliQ to her sister, who had passed, saying they had similar personalities. When her ElliQ started to malfunction, Intuition Robotics wanted to replace the older unit, but the user wouldn’t hear of it. She wanted her ElliQ, she said. The company was able to repair and upgrade the original unit for her.

ElliQ is not a solution for everyone, of course. During our project, we’ve seen that the most independent and active users, most of whom still drive, tend to get less benefit from having an ElliQ, which makes sense: they are still more integrated into their communities and are able to get out of their houses. We’ve also seen a couple of instances where poor wifi connectivity made ElliQ less effective because of frequent service interruptions. But for most users, there has been high engagement, and they report less loneliness.

ElliQ and other technological advances open some exciting doors for new ways to support clients as they choose to age in place—especially as we look forward at demographic trends: the age wave will bring more older adults, especially in the 85+ age group, and simultaneously a decrease in younger adults who might provide caregiving support, whether paid or as unpaid family caregivers. If we don’t expand our notion of how to support people, we will eventually reach a place where far too many older adults are forced to go without needed care. Finding new ways to provide support is critical. Fortunately, technology is offering new options all the time. It won’t solve everything, but it’s a great tool to improve safety and independence.



WA Cares Fund Will Help Address Long-Term Care Gaps

If you or a family member have suddenly experienced a catastrophic illness or injury, or a more gradual decline due to dementia or chronic disease, you may have run into the gaping hole of long-term care coverage. It looks like this: if you don’t have long-term care insurance (most don’t because it’s not affordable for working and middle-class households), the cost of personal care at home is shocking: about \$36,000 for 20 hours a week for one year. The cost of moving someone to a care facility is much higher: it ranges from \$5,000-\$10,000+ a month for an Adult Family Home, Assisted Living Facility, or Skilled Nursing Facility.

But wait, that’s not all. Medicare *does not pay long-term care expenses*. It will pay for certain one-time and short-term costs, such as a 6-week stay at a rehab facility after an illness or injury; it will not pay the ongoing cost to move to assisted living, for example. Medicaid will pay for long-term care, but it is only available to those with economic need. The amount you must “spend down” is the difference between your monthly income and the Medically Needy Income Limit (MNIL). This can be thought of as a deductible. In 2023, the MNIL in WA is \$914 / month for a single senior applicant, as well as for a married couple.

So, what happens when someone needs long-term care and can’t afford it? If the person is fortunate enough to have family and friends who can help, those people often provide support as unpaid caregivers. Washington State currently has an estimated 820,000 unpaid family caregivers, many of whom have no training and no support. Unpaid caregivers aren’t “free”: they often reduce work hours or quit working all together, are stressed, fatigued, and sometimes experience injuries of their own. Those who don’t have family or friends able to step in often try to make do alone, without support, frequently with negative consequences such as a further decline in health or injuries. *(Note: O3A has programs to assist unpaid caregivers. If you or someone you know is providing care, please contact us to find out more. See below for contact information.)*

Which brings us back to WA Cares. Working adults pay into the insurance fund at 58 cents per \$100 earned. A typical worker who makes around \$50,000 a year will contribute \$291 a year. Over 20 years, that’s \$5,820. The benefit, when needed, is \$36,500 (adjusted with inflation over time). That’s enough to pay for a year of in-home personal care at 20 hours a week or two

years at 10 hours a week.

The benefit is much more flexible than that, though. Instead of or in addition to caregivers, the fund can pay for a whole host of non-medical expenses to help keep someone in their home, from ramps and grab bars to home-delivered meals to mobility devices.

To learn more about the fund and how to qualify for benefits starting in 2026, visit <https://wacaresfund.wa.gov/>.

To find support for unpaid family caregivers, visit o3a.org and click our Programs tab, or contact one of the offices listed above in this newsletter.

Are You Following O3A on Facebook?

Stay informed with our Facebook posts! Up-to-date information about what we're up to and what's happening in the state and nationally.



Find us here:

<https://www.facebook.com/O3AInfoandassistance>



Get Help Paying for Medicare

Did you know if you have limited income and qualify, Medicare and the State of Washington offer a way to help pay for your Medicare costs? The state program is called the Medicare Savings Programs (MSP) and Social Security's program is called Extra Help or Low-Income Subsidy (LIS). Statewide Health Insurance

Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) volunteers can help see if you qualify and sign you up!

The Medicare Savings Program helps people on Medicare, who qualify, pay for all or part of their Medicare premiums.

It may cover your Medicare:

- Part A premiums
- Part B premiums
- Coinsurance
- Copayments
- Deductibles

The Extra Help program helps qualified Medicare beneficiaries pay their Medicare Part D prescription drug plan costs. Depending on your income and assets, you may qualify for a full or partial subsidy. It covers:

- Premiums
- Deductibles
- Copays
- Donut hole/coverage gap (This is when Medicare temporarily stops paying for your prescriptions and you have to pay the entire cost of medications)

To get more information about these programs and to get one-on-one help with your Medicare questions from one of our SHIBA volunteers, come to a free, first-come-first-served, walk-in clinic (Jefferson and Clallam Counties). See our calendar here: <https://www.o3a.org/news/events-calendar/>. In

Grays Harbor or Pacific Counties, please call your local office or visit

[Medicare and Health Insurance Consultations | WA | O3A](#)

SHIBA is a program of the Washington state Office of the Insurance Commissioner’s Consumer Protection division. SHIBA volunteer counselors provide free, unbiased and confidential help with Medicare to people of all ages and backgrounds. SHIBA counselors are background checked and trained by the Insurance Commissioner’s office. We do not sell anything, we’re strictly a counseling service. In our county, SHIBA is sponsored by the Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A).

2024-27 Area Plan Now Available

The final draft of our four-year plan is now available on our website [here](#).

The Area Plan describes O3A's priorities, funding, service area, and more and lays out our plan for the next few years as we adjust to post-pandemic life and get ready for coming changes to the populations we serve.



FACT SHEET

Medications Linked to Falls

Review medications with all patients 65 and older. Medication management can reduce interactions and side effects that may lead to falls.

STOP medications when possible.

SWITCH to safer alternatives.

REDUCE medications to the lowest effective dose.

Check for psychoactive medications, such as:

▶ Anticonvulsants

▶ Benzodiazepines

▶ Antidepressants*

▶ Opioids

▶ Antipsychotics

▶ Sedatives-hypnotics*

Review prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and herbal supplements. Some can cause dizziness, sedation, confusion, blurred vision, or orthostatic hypotension. These include:

▶ Anticholinergics

▶ Medications affecting blood pressure

▶ Antihistamines

▶ Muscle relaxants

Develop a patient plan that includes medication changes, and a monitoring plan for potential side effects. Implement other strategies, including non-pharmacologic options to manage conditions, address patient barriers, and reduce fall risk.

Visit the [American Geriatrics Society Beers Criteria](#) for more information on medications linked to falls.

CDC's STEADI tools and resources can help you screen, assess, and intervene to reduce your patient's fall risk. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/steadi

*Antidepressants include TCAs and SSRIs. Sedative-hypnotics include eszopiclone, zaleplon, and zolpidem.

STEADI Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

2017

Do You Know if Your Medications are Increasing Your Risk of Falls?

Some medications are associated with increased fall risk. Know how to identify which ones may be an issue and talk with your primary care provider about whether it's safe to change medications or reduce the dose.

Never cut down on or stop a prescribed medication without talking to your primary care provider first.

Have a Voice in Aging and Disability Services! Join O3A’s Advisory Council

O3A’s Advisory Council represents the public we serve. The AC advises leadership and staff on programs and services and engages in advocacy with the state legislature to promote the interests of older adults and adults with disabilities. The AC meets monthly (with a couple months off) virtually with an in-person option that currently rotates between Aberdeen and Sequim. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more, please contact Michelle Fogus at michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov or 360.538.8876.



Current openings:

We are seeking at-large members (one each) from Grays Harbor, Jefferson, and Pacific Counties.

We are also seeking one regional representative (may be from any of the four counties) for each of the following:

- Tribal representative

- Disability representative
- Minority representative
- Local elected official (any elected office)



Moving Towards Dementia-Friendly Communities

With the coming Age Wave (sometimes called the Silver Tsunami), we will be facing several new challenges. The aging trend means we will soon have many more older adults, including those over age 85. In addition to exacerbating the existing shortage of both unpaid and paid caregivers who support older adults to age in place, this age wave will bring more chronic conditions, other illnesses, and injuries. One of the most significant is the expected increase in Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

"The stigma of memory loss prevents many people from getting an early diagnosis," said Laura Cepoi, O3A's Executive Director. "That, in turn, keeps them from getting the additional support they and their family need as they start their journey."

O3A is in the process of hiring a Dementia Specialist to work with families as well as many others in the community to help spread awareness of early signs, the benefits of diagnosis, and available supports. The Dementia Specialist will also work on creating and strengthening things like the Memory Cafe model, which provides a safe, supportive place for those with memory loss and their care partners to spend time and share their experiences.

"We just had a Memory Cafe in Port Townsend, and it drew 20 people," said Cepoi. "That exceeded our expectations and showed us that the need is there. People are looking for resources and ways to connect."

Check the calendar at o3a.org for future Memory Cafes and scheduled presentations.

Port Townsend to Start Offering Senior Lunches M-F

"We like to make sure everyone is getting a good lunch," said Jim Lopez, President of the Port Townsend Senior Association (PTSA). "I'm not sure what their nutrition is like outside of [what they get] here. And equally important to the nutrition is the social aspect."



The PTSA is gearing up to start offering senior lunches five days a week, thanks to a new contract between the Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A) and the Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP) that will fund congregate meals. O3A and CCAP were recently able to purchase an industrial-size freezer. Aside from the logistical challenge of getting it into the center, the freezer is a boon, allowing CCAP to store the large amounts of food needed to feed the expected 25+ seniors a day once the lunches start.

Up until last May, the center hosted one meal a week, which was provided by the Presbyterian church. "It was popular," Lopez said. Even after the meal service ended, many local seniors have continued to bring their own sack lunches so they can socialize. After the meal, some stay for bingo. Lopez noted that many of them live alone and it's important for them to have a chance to spend time with other people their age.

"We have served senior meals in our other five sites for many years now," said John O'Lague, Social & Employment Services Program Director at CCAP, "and when this opportunity came up, I was quick to say yes. We see the value in this awesome program, as we understand that for some older adults,

this could be their only access to a healthy home-cooked meal, but just as important, it is a way for older adults to meet older adults.”

O’Lague said they are in the process of hiring a cook. The meal schedule will be posted on the PTSA website at www.ptseniors.com when available.

Note: a longer version of this article first appeared in the Port Townsend Leader.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: A Key Ingredient to Well-Being for Older Adults

Social Engagement Benefits for Older Adults

Improved mental health and higher quality of life (Luo et al., 2020)







Longer life spans (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010)



Sense of purpose (Zhang et al., 2018)

Social Engagement Benefits for the Community

Social engagement reduces Medicare expenses, as social isolation costs Medicare \$6.7 billion every year (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2017)







Individuals share wisdom and experience through intergenerational mentoring and other community activities



Older adults tend to volunteer more than others (Kent, 2011), with each hour of volunteering valued at \$29.95 (Independent Sector, 2022)

Click here to insert agency logo

Insert contact information



This project #90EECC0002 is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$300,000 (or 74 percent) funded by ACL/HHS and \$106,740 (or 26 percent) funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Social Engagement is a Key Part of Healthy Aging

Start building and expanding your connections today! Social connections benefit your mental and physical health and improve quality of life.

Not sure where to start? Check out your local library, senior center, community center, and anywhere you might be able to volunteer. Contributing your time and talents is a great way to grow connections!

PASS THIS ON! Share Trending Healthy with a friend!

Do you know someone who might enjoy reading Trending Healthy? Forward this email to them, or let them know how to sign up online: Just visit www.O3A.org, scroll down to the bottom of the page, and fill out the brief form to be added to our mailing list.

Thanks, and happy reading!



Editor's Invitation: Thank you for reading *Trending Healthy*. Please let us know if there is an important topic about healthy aging that you would like to see us address. You can email michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov with your suggestions.





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