

# As senior population increases, a greater need for care services

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The number of older adults in Virginia is increasing rapidly, specifically for those aged 85 and older, according to the Virginia Department for Aging. This demographic is projected to increase five times faster than the state's total population by 2025.

An increase of 51.4% is also projected for those aged 65 and above over the next two decades — to about 2 million by 2040, according to a report commissioned by LeadingAge Virginia in 2018. That spike should be a concern for the more than 65,000 people in Virginia Beach who are over age 65 and will need crucial health care services and support as they age.

November is Home Care and

Hospice Month, a time to recognize and honor all the dedicated caregivers including home care aides, home health aides, nurses, therapists, social workers and chaplains who make a tremendous and impactful difference for the older adults and their families in Hampton Roads who depend on their assistance.

Our team at Westminster Canterbury at Home, which offers certified home health and hospice as well as private duty home care and lifeline to older adults in the Hampton Roads area, continuously demonstrates extraordinary compassion for our clients and family members.

One example of this devotion comes from a program sponsored by our foundation called Memorable Moments. During a recent visit to one of our hospice patients, our clinician noticed the patient was depressed and mostly bedbound. But the clini-

cian also noticed something else: The patient had artwork in his room that he painted.

Our clinician brought canvas and painting supplies to the patient, and the two of them spent quality time painting together. As they painted, the patient sat up, became more conversational and displayed a cheerful mood. This interaction and bonding with others truly exemplify the spirit of Home Care and Hospice Month.

Many older people living at home in Virginia Beach need help with daily things such as bathing, eating meals or getting in and out of bed. Research shows that many of us will need formal long-term care and services as we age, in addition to the care we receive from our families and friends. Too many can't access the help they need to stay at home, while others are stuck on lengthy affordable hous-

ing waiting lists, skipping meals and medicine to pay rent.

The nation is at an important crossroads where we finally have an opportunity to make essential public investments in aging care and services that are desperately needed by older adults and their families. According to AARP, the vast majority of older adults want to stay at home rather than move to a care center. The need for in-home services will grow as there are more older adults to serve.

We must create a better system of long-term services and supports to help Americans living at home. If we want a strong infrastructure for people to be able to age in place, we must support public policy that advocates a living wage for caregivers, create pathways to encourage people to prepare for health care jobs, and offer affordability and accessibility to families needing

care.

I ask that we all commemorate the power of caring and show thanks for these caregivers, who choose to use their lives to care for our aged, disabled, and dying, and bring dignity to not only those in Hampton Roads, but throughout the commonwealth.

*Dana Parsons is the vice president and legislative counsel of LeadingAge Virginia, an association of not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients across the senior care continuum including life plan/continuing care communities, senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes, adult day centers, and home and community-based services. Dr. Nancy King is the president of Westminster Canterbury at Home, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay.*