

Aging Happens: Access to resources for all sorts of aging situations

By Ellen Waldman

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There are many more resources here locally than you're probably aware of, and you might need to access them at some point. In the last column I introduced a variety of these. Once more, we enter the realm of vital services for aging adults. All these are offered and managed by Senior and Disability Services (SDS) through the Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG; rvcog.org).

Let's start with the housing topic. As you can imagine, most people want to age in their current homes for as long as possible. But what makes this possible is a set of criteria that have been determined over long years of study. Now, at the website for Lifelong Housing (lifelonghousing.org; 541-423-1383), you'll find the certification process for evaluating a home's accessibility and/or adaptability. Even if you have no plans to have your home actually certified, the checklists developed for the three levels of certification will give you an overview of what to look for in your own home's suitability. This program was developed in partnership with AARP Oregon (states.aarp.org/about-aarp-oregon) to meet the growing need (actually the demand) for homes that support safely aging-in-place. It's worth your time to peruse this site and see how your house stacks up under these standards. If you find that your home might not work out in the future, you could take the next steps and start looking around the area now. Because of the hillsides, Ashland in particular does not have an abundance of highly sought-after, one-story, accessible homes.

Another area that often doesn't get addressed are the needs of older adults who have behavioral health issues. This could present as dementia, depression, and/or the full range of mental health (now called behavioral health) challenges. I once attended a seminar focused on a particular type of personality disorder. I asked the presenter how they're addressing this complex disorder in the aging population, especially if the person now also has some form of cognitive impairment. He was stumped and said that he hadn't actually considered that. Well, I can tell you that personality disorders or other behavioral health conditions aren't necessarily outgrown as people age. Just ask their families who have a very difficult time finding the right supports and facilities for them. And it's always further complicated if there is also the addition of dementia.

Enter Older Adult Behavioral Specialist (OABHS) Sean Connolly (sconnolly@rvcog.org; 541-423-1364). He can provide consultations on complex cases and help with navigating the local resources. The OLBHS is supported by an initiative that strengthens services to communities in Oregon. They collaborate with other agencies that serve this population and provide a variety of trainings for the wider community. We're fortunate to be able to access this service locally.

The last resource you may want to know about is the Disaster Registry (rvcog.org/sds/emergency-preparedness/disaster-registry). Their motto is "Think Ahead. Be Prepared." (Sounds like my motto for these columns.) This site has a form you can download to register someone who might need special assistance from fire, police, health and rescue workers during disasters. This includes outside help to

safely leave your home; being in jeopardy if you stayed in your home, without assistance, for three days; or need special notifications about evacuation, due to impairment.

You can register online, or fill out the form and mail it to: SDS, RVCOG Disaster Registry, P.O. Box 3275, Central Point OR 97502. It may take three months or more for your information to be available to rescue workers. If you have any questions about the Disaster Registry, please call 541-664-6674.

When I recently co-taught a class offering these and other services and resources, one comment we heard was that people felt overwhelmed by all this information. That's certainly understandable. On the other hand, there is also a similar feeling of being overwhelmed when an unexpected crisis strikes and no one has prepared for or considered how to meet these needs. If you know what's available ahead of time, you can reach out more easily to these resources and receive this help.