



## **HHSC Recognizes Innovators in Aging**

Annually the Texas Health and Human Services Commission recognizes the Innovators in Aging award recipients who have made positive impacts on the lives of older adults in Texas.

Texas' older adult population is quickly growing, creating an opportunity for enhanced efforts to support older adults to age and live well. HHSC's Innovators in Aging award, now in its fourth year, recognizes recipients from across the state for developing and conducting new and innovative ideas that meet the needs of older Texans.

"Every day across Texas there are many people and organizations working to improve the lives of older Texans. It is important that we recognize them for their contributions and that we encourage others to take bold, innovative actions," said Holly Riley, Aging Services Coordination Director for HHSC.

More information is available at [hhs.texas.gov](https://hhs.texas.gov). Texas residents can dial 2-1-1 to learn about programs and services for older adults.

## **Previous Winners by Category and Year**

### ***Be Healthy Award Category***

This award category highlights innovative efforts that create opportunities for improved physical and mental health for older adults.

#### **2022**

**Anavah Health** developed The Knowable "smart brief" that detects the presence of wetness in real-time, enabling caregivers to change older adults' undergarments more quickly. This new development will help prevent urinary tract infections, pressure ulcers, and pain in older adults.

**WayWiser** created a private, secure, collaborative platform where loved ones can connect with family members, close friends, and key professionals to help manage the care and safety of an aging parent as a team. The platform offers a care coordination feature allowing users to post daily caregiving updates, calendar events or appointments, medication needs, and coordinate other forms of care.

#### **2021**

**Carissa Nair**, this high school student from Houston created a comprehensive statistical survey to determine the extent to which the pandemic had impacted residents of long-term care facilities. Based on the survey results, Carissa developed a resource with best practices on mood-elevation techniques to help

older adults cope during the pandemic. Carissa also created and delivered 50 mental wellness kits that contained activities for the residents, including journals, scrapbooking materials and other items.

## **2020**

**Joan Cox** has led the Austin Rockin' Line Dancers group at the South Austin Senior Activity Center since 2001. The group encourages older adults to stay active and engaged in a fun way. Joan coordinates weekly classes for beginner and intermediate/advanced dancers, creates instructional videos for at-home participation, and schedules group performances throughout the Austin area. She also helps coordinate and promote the annual statewide Texas Line Dance Jamboree.

**Baker Ripley Dementia Day Center** developed two programs to help older adults with dementia and their caregivers maintain physical and emotional well-being during the pandemic. The Virtual Activities and Mobile Respite program offers a menu of virtual activities, including short story discussions, word games, and spiritual events for the day center members and their caregivers to engage in. The Mobile Respite program provides 3-hour daily "field trip tours." To allow for social distancing and member screenings, only three members may participate on a trip in the tour. The tour takes members to new places around the city while their caregivers receive a much-needed break.

## **2019**

**Dr. Jason Burnett and the Forensic Assessment Center Network- Adult Division** creates opportunities for mistreatment experts in the fields of geriatric medicine and forensics accessible to APS and HHSC provider investigation specialists across the state through telehealth. Dr. Jason Burnett is a gerontologist who has been involved with the treatment and care of persons age 65 or over and adults with disabilities for over 20 years. FACN, under the leadership of Dr. Burnett, partnered with the APS program to provide support to APS staff to make better decisions about adult safety and well-being.

**Laura Golden and Cheyenne Rhodes** are part of the clinical care team at the My Health My Resources (MHMR) of Tarrant County that created and successfully implemented a person-centered, dementia-friendly intervention for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and dementia. The intervention focused on identification of dementia in adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and was the first dementia intervention specific to the intellectual and developmental disability population in Tarrant County.

**Active for Life®** is a program in the Texas A&M Center for Population Health and Aging that addresses the critical issue of translating research into practice to meet the needs of the growing numbers of older adults. The program includes a variety of evidence-based programs and interventions to improve the health and wellbeing of older Texans and their caregivers. These efforts bring together partners and stakeholders to create coordinated and seamless linkages between clinical and

community encounters, which can help older adults become active members of their healthcare team.

### ***Be Connected Award Category***

This award category highlights innovative efforts that create ways for older adults to initiate and maintain community engagement.

#### **2022**

**Artifcts, Inc.** is a safe, secure space to capture, preserve, and share personal and world history “one Artifct at a time.” Artifcts, Inc. patent-pending website and mobile app helps save and share the histories, stories, and memories behind treasured belongings. The organization is also partnering with veterans’ groups, memory care centers, and nonprofits serving older adults to provide Artifcts as an engagement activity within those communities.

**Global Agetech Innovations Laboratory (GAIL)** is a virtual collective laboratory that brings together the expertise of researchers, government agencies, educational institutions, businesses, older adults and caregivers, gerontologists, healthcare organizations, and financial institutions to improve the quality of products and services for older adults.

#### **2021**

**Austin Speech Labs**, founded in 2008, provides affordable speech therapy services to survivors of stroke who are uninsured or have exhausted their insurance benefits. To keep fees low, the program used volunteers and graduate students who, under the supervision of licensed therapists, provide thousands of therapy hours each year. Clients can receive therapy in the office or from their home via teletherapy. The program also offers support services for caregivers, including respite and support groups.

#### **2020**

**AMightyGoodTime.com** is an easy-to-use event website that helps older adults find a variety of social and wellness opportunities tailored for them. The site features local, national, virtual, and phone-accessible experiences and allows anyone to browse, create, and promote age-friendly events. The site helps older adults find activities and events that are age-friendly all in one place.

**Methodist Generations** is a free, hospital-based membership program open to anyone 55 and older. The program offers classes to thousands of older adults each month at three of the Methodist Health System hospital campuses. The classes cover topics such as fall prevention, immunity boosting diets, taking care of diabetes, and managing grief. The program also hosts “lunch and learns” and a variety of exercise, yoga, art, and creative writing classes. When COVID-19 cases began occurring, the program transitioned to hosting virtual events to protect participants and staff.

**Don Smith** has served as the Director of the Tarrant County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and Vice President at the United Way of Tarrant County since 2005. He has 32 years' experience working for public service and governmental organizations, including four Texas AAAs. Under his guidance, United Way and the AAA of Tarrant County have garnered \$15 million in funding from various national grants. He also leads the implementation of United Way's 10-year Healthy Aging and Independent Living Initiative. Don, elected President of Texas Healthy at Home in January of 2017, serves this corporation providing a state-wide, comprehensive array of wellness and social services to support community living. Don is committed to promoting awareness of aging issues for all Texans and is nationally recognized as a leader in the field of aging.

## **2019**

**The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Garrison Institute on Aging:** The Garrison Institute on Aging is a collaborative initiative aiming to advance healthy aging through innovative research, education, and community outreach, and offers RSVP, a Healthy Aging Lecture Series, and the Care Partner Academy, a caregiver support group.

**AGE of Central Texas and Blanton Museum of Art:** This unique partnership offers an accessible opportunity for people living with early memory loss and their caregivers to have an interactive museum experience, promoting connection between the older adult with dementia and their caregiver.

**Caring in Action:** Caring in Action connects people of all ages, faiths, and backgrounds through volunteering and engagement. The initiative pairs volunteers with older adults residing in nursing or assisted living facilities through The Holiday Project and shares HHSC Age Well Live Well resources through the Activity Professionals of Texas Networking Group.

### ***Be Informed Award Category***

This award category highlights innovative efforts that create opportunities for older adults to learn about the services and resources available in their community.

## **2022**

**Nancy Walker** is the volunteer executive director for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas (FCACTX). FCACTX is a nonprofit organization run entirely by volunteers who help educate the public about end-of-life planning, decision-making, and related issues. Nancy has been a key figure in assisting thousands of people to develop an end-of-life plan best suited for their needs.

**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities** have partnered to improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, caregivers, partners, and community providers throughout Texas. Their partnership established the Regional Coordinator

Initiative to help people with disabilities and others around the state have access to region-specific information, resources, and events.

## 2021

**Alamo Area Council of Governments** has used quick, efficient and far-reaching communications to share COVID-19-related public service announcements (PSA) with older adult residents throughout the pandemic. The organization's communications team used English and Spanish social media, TV, radio and newspaper ads targeting adults age 60 and older. Additionally, the organization produced 30-second PSA videos that local cable providers ran, which featured well-known community leaders. By using different communication mediums and community leaders, AACOG was able to provide a comprehensive communications campaign that increased awareness of information and services during the pandemic.

## 2020

**Gerontology Resources and the Aging Community in Education (GRACE)** is a field-based learning program designed to increase social work students' knowledge of and experience with older adults. The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work coordinates GRACE and implements social work field instructors employed at various Austin-area agencies providing services to older adults. GRACE complements the students' field experience and educational enrichment events that provide specialized knowledge in areas important to social work practice in gerontology. The St. David's Foundation supports and awards GRACE scholarships through a competitive process to students at participating GRACE agencies.

**Sunrise Community Church Homeless Program** serves adults in Austin experiencing homelessness, many of whom have experienced trauma as well. The program provides food, housing navigation services, and assistance with things such as mail and document storage and obtaining important identification documents. The program also assists individuals with applying for and coordinating benefits, including Veterans Affairs and Social Security Disability benefits. The church is currently hosting onsite the CommUnity Care Mobile Clinic, where individuals can obtain COVID-19 testing, health care,

## 2019

**Jim Jonson and The Medicare Puzzle:** The Medicare Puzzle is a 50-minute video that provides an overview of the Medicare system and a detailed breakdown of its requirements and protocols. Jim Jonson, a volunteer Benefits Counselor at the AAA for 14 years, presents the information.