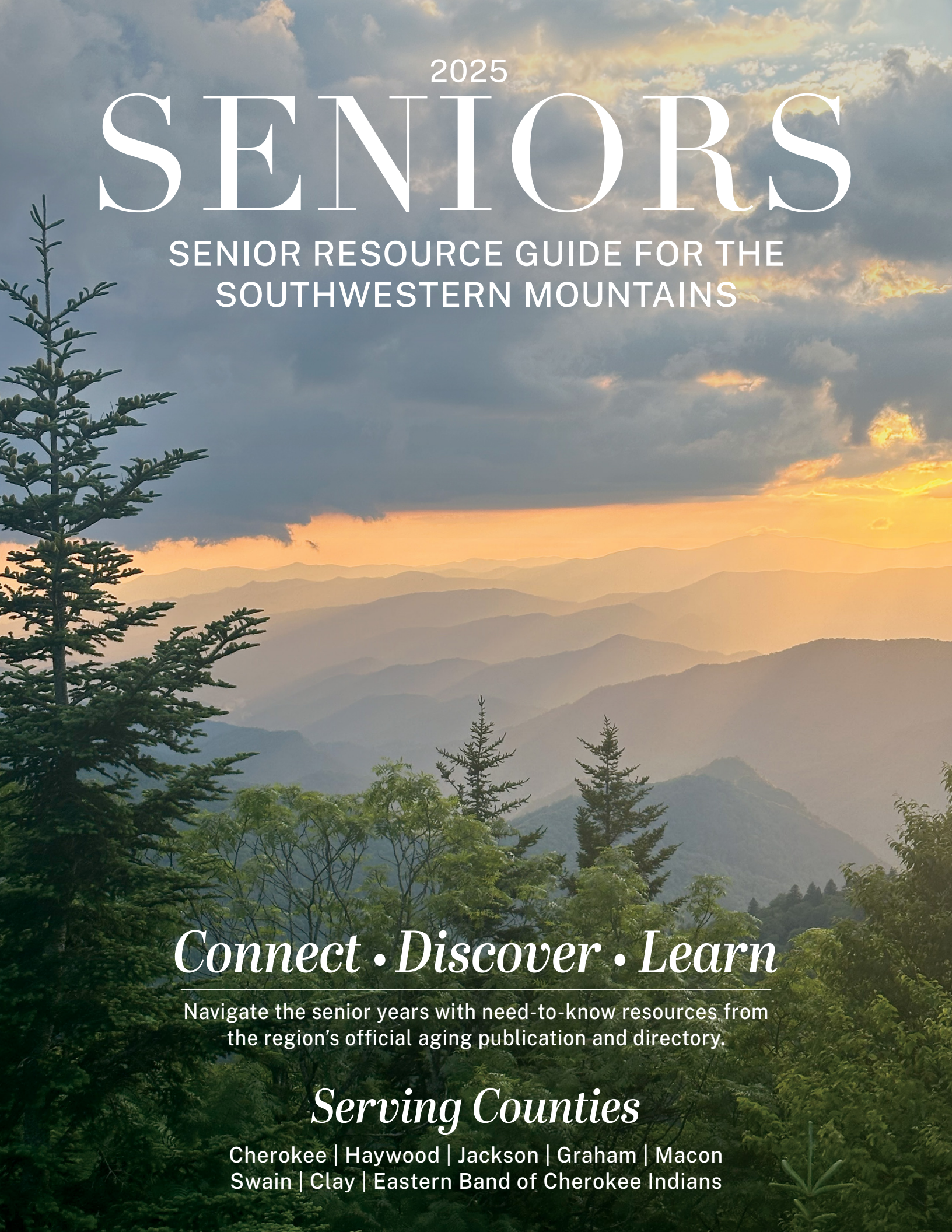




2025

# SENIORS

SENIOR RESOURCE GUIDE FOR THE  
SOUTHWESTERN MOUNTAINS

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# Welcome to the fourth edition of SENIORS.

*Senior Resource Guide for the Southwestern Mountains of N.C.*



**A**ging is a journey with its share of challenges, but at the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging, we see it as a time of immense possibility. A chance to discover new hobbies, build new connections, explore new horizons, deepen relationships with loved ones, and accept aging with vitality.

We hope this edition of SENIORS empowers you

with information, guidance, connections, a little fun, and access to important resources.

“May you embrace change with grace and find beauty in every stage of your journey.”

— Sarajane Melton, director of Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging

**Sarajane Melton,**  
**Executive Director of**  
**Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging**

The Southwestern Mountains Senior Resource Guide of North Carolina was produced in partnership by the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging and The Mountaineer Publishing Company. Free copies are available at numerous locations that serve older adults throughout Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Graham, Clay and Cherokee counties. To request copies of this publication, please contact 828-586-1962.

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Seniors create a ‘human map’ of the seven western counties, with each t-shirt color representing a different county, during the annual Seniors Celebration hosted by the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging.



Veterans gather for the Smoky Mountain Veterans Stand Down in Macon County.



Seniors enjoy good times and fellowship at the regional Seniors Celebration in Swain County.



Reeling in a catch on a field trip with the Tsali Manor Senior Center.



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*Cover photo by Therese Murdock.  
Waterrock Knob on the Blue Ridge Parkway*



# Discover your local Senior Center

## *Connect and engage with other seniors, activities and resources*

Never done yoga and afraid to start now? Fearful that your granddaughter will Facetime your phone and you won't know how to answer? Not to worry, there's a place where seniors can pick up on all these skills, have some fun, and make new friends to boot.

Senior Centers provide a welcoming environment to explore new pastimes or experience something you haven't done before — whether it's learning to paint or drum.

"One of the things that really draws people here is card games. We have a big bridge group. We have line dancing on Fridays," said Becky Grindstaff, director of the Clay County Senior Center. "And we've got a chair yoga class that people really love."

Exploring activities that might be outside a senior's comfort zone is an integral part of healthy aging, Grindstaff explained.

"Things like this really get the mind going. It's very active, and there's a crowd, so you get the mental aspect of it and the socialization all at once," she said.

Often, programs are led by seniors, for seniors. Including 91-year-old Reesa Boyce, who leads tai chi



Tsali Manor Director Monica Wildcat (right) creates a welcoming environment at the senior center.



Seniors at the Hiwassee Dam Senior Center in Cherokee County got crafty with the creation of colorful wooden quilt blocks.

classes at the Crawford Senior Center in Macon County.

"Reesa is 91 years young and attributes her longevity to staying mentally and physically active," said Jennifer Hollifield, administrative officer for Macon County Senior Services. "Sharing teaching gives her purpose!"

Senior Centers regularly host educational talks, like avoiding falls or how to use your smart phone. Some programs tackle aging topics that can otherwise be difficult to confront on your own, like Hospice Care 101 or caregiver burn-out.

"Our digital literacy class is wonderful. Wonderful. It starts with 'this is your on button.' So they learn everything about the computer and how to use it. And they also learn how to use cell phones during the class, too," Grindstaff said.

Digital literacy is an important skill for seniors to gain, as it helps them stay in touch with distant friends and family, she added.

Senior Centers also organize a host of field trips, allowing seniors to venture out without having to drive. Destinations can include outlet shops, bowling, holiday events, sightseeing, or dinner shows in Gatlinburg.

"Many of the older adults who go on the trips are no longer comfortable driving out of town," Hollifield shared. "These trips provide an opportunity for fellowship and a chance to visit places that otherwise they may not be able to go"

Above all, Senior Centers provide an essential outlet for socialization and companionship. Bingo is hands-down one of the most popular activities at any Senior Center.

"After all, who doesn't like to play a game and win prizes?" Hollifield said. "Social events provide great opportunities for new and old friendships to develop. Every person, regardless of age, wants and needs companionship."

Senior Centers provide more than a social outlet, however. They also serve as a clearinghouse to connect seniors with resources and support services. Senior Center staff can direct you to the right place for everything from Medicare enrollment and volunteer opportunities to in-home care providers and heating assistance.

See the directory listings for senior Center locations in your county. For those who can't drive or find a ride on their own, the local transit program in each county provides transportation to and from the Senior Centers daily.



# All aboard: *County transit services will get you there and back again*

Life doesn't stop just because it gets harder to move around. That's why county transit services are such a valuable tool for seniors, providing low-cost rides to work, the grocery store, volunteer opportunities and everything in between.

Every county in the region has a transit service to assist seniors in getting around. They also transport seniors to medical appointments and facilities in other counties and even to the Asheville airport.

Transit services provide independence for seniors who don't have family nearby or simply don't want to ask for a ride every time they need to go somewhere.

"There's a great need. There are a lot of seniors who don't drive or don't have transportation. So we provide a lot of those services for seniors who otherwise don't have the means to get out of the house," said Jennifer West,

Director of Cherokee County Transit.

Transit vans are equipped with wheelchair lifts, and service animals are welcome.

"If there's an ambulatory need, or maybe their knees just aren't good and they can't walk up the steps to get into the van, they can also ride the wheelchair lift up," West shared.

For first-timers who might feel shy about riding with strangers, transit drivers and fellow riders will make you feel right at home. For those who are reluctant to ask for help because they don't want to burden anyone, that's what transit is here for, West pointed out.

"We have very friendly drivers. All of our drivers love their jobs, that's why they are here. It's not an inconvenience at all," she said.

## How to get a ride

County transit services are provided



Macon County Transit driver provides shelter from the storm.

on-demand, meaning seniors must call ahead to book a ride.

"Just as much advance notice as they can give us, the better," West said.

Haywood, Jackson and Macon counties also offer regular routes with scheduled stops.

The charge is nominal, usually between \$1 and \$3 for local trips. The fare can be up to \$5 for longer distances, and trips to neighboring counties are generally \$15 and up.

*Find the transit program for your county in the directory starting on page 36.*

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# Hot and ready

## Connect with senior meal options in your community

More than one dozen meal sites in the seven western counties serve hundreds of nutritious mid-day meals five days a week, alongside the camaraderie of other seniors.

Seniors can enjoy activities and programs along with their meal, including games, crafts, and guest speakers on special topics. Meal sites also provide educational outreach, from health screenings to nutrition counseling, and keep seniors informed about other resources in the community.

Meals are free to those over 60,



although adults of any age can enjoy the hot meal for a nominal donation. Seniors who are unable to drive can get a ride to meal locations with their local county transit program.

Check the listings directory in this magazine for the senior meal options in your county.

## Home Delivered Meals

Every county has a home-delivered meal program, providing hot mid-day meals five days a week right to your doorstep. Some seniors may only need home-delivered meals for a short period while recovering from a surgery or illness, while others may receive meals for an extended time.

And don't worry, there's plenty of food to go around.

"One of the biggest misconceptions is that you are taking away from someone who might need these meals more," said Melissa Crisp, deputy director of Graham County Senior Center.

And home-delivered meal programs have benefits beyond just

filling empty stomachs.

"We do have a lot of seniors on our rounds that we are their only contact for the day, the only person they see or talk to. Our drivers get to know these people, and they care for them. They go above and beyond. They might feed an animal, or move something heavy, or make a phone call. Whatever the client needs, we try to do," Crisp said.

Older adults being cared for at home by a caregiver can be eligible for home-delivered meals, as well.

Volunteers who deliver the meals are a vital lifeline. There is an ongoing need for more volunteers. A variety of volunteer opportunities are available.

See the listings directory in this magazine for home-delivered meal options or information on volunteering.



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# Deciphering the Medicare maze

If there's one rite of passage universally shared by all seniors, it's Medicare. Medicare ads start pummeling your mailbox well before the milestone of 65, but they just make the daunting process even more confusing.

Simply figuring out the various enrollment windows can feel like walking a tightrope. Luckily, there's a program to help seniors sort through the mountain of Medicare decisions. It's called the Seniors Health Insurance Information Program, or SHIIP for short.

"It provides unbiased information to the consumer about what Medicare does, supplements, advantage plans, and prescription plans," Haywood County SHIIP advisor John Chicoine said.

Every county in the region has a SHIIP office, and it's free to make an appointment for a Medicare consultation.

"It's really just sitting down with the person and giving them all the information so they can make the appropriate decisions when they turn 65 because it's going to really affect them for the rest of their life," Chicoine said.

Being proactive up front can save



you headache later. And making good choices the first time around is paramount because you can be locked into a plan for a while once you sign up, Chicoine explained.

"If you do the wrong thing, I get people coming back to me later and saying, I don't think I did the right thing. That initial choice is crucial," he said.

One of the biggest Medicare pitfalls is choosing the wrong prescription drug plan. Each plan — all 28 of them — has its own formulary for what medicines are covered. SHIIP counselors can help you figure out which drug plans include your medications.

The same precaution is needed when picking a health coverage plan under Medicare. Think ahead to all the doctors you might need to see in the coming year. Are they in-network for the Medicare plan you're considering? It's even trickier in the

rural far western counties, where seniors travel into Georgia, Tennessee and South Carolina for medical care.

Another decision point is supplemental insurance. Should you get it? Is it worth it? What if you're still working? And what is Medicare Advantage all about?

SHIIP counselors won't advise seniors what plan to pick or what choice to

make, and they can't actually sign you up. But you will be armed with facts to arrive at your own decision.

"It's one of the most important decisions you are going to make at 65. Sitting down and getting some information so you can make a good decision is so important," Chicoine said.

*See the county-by-county directory starting on page 36 for the SHIIP program in your county to learn more.*



John Chicoine, Haywood County SHIIP advisor

## Dive into Medicare fact-finding well before you turn 65

The initial enrollment window runs from three months before to three months after the month you turn 65 — a seven-month window in all. So be proactive, study those plans, and contact your local

SHIIP office for help. See the directory listings for the SHIIP contact in each county.

In addition to making an appointment with a SHIIP counselor for a Medicare consultation, the federal Medicare website has a tool for comparing various plans online. Go to [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). For more information about the SHIIP program, visit [www.ncshiip.com](http://www.ncshiip.com).



# When daily life gets challenging, a helping hand can make all the difference

Many seniors need help with daily tasks or routine care in their homes, from bathing and feeding to cooking and cleaning. Sometimes, it can be difficult for an older adult to come to terms with needing help.

Seeking in-home assistance doesn't mean giving up independence, however. Ultimately, in-home aid or home health services can help seniors realize more freedom without having to rely on family members for all their needs.

"Ultimately, our goal is to help people be as independent as possible," said Pam Middleton, a medical social worker with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. "Get them back to their maximum potential."

In-home care could even be getting someone to run errands. It also allows older adults to stay in their own homes longer by getting help with the tasks they can no longer do independently. And there are long-term benefits to in-home care that transcend simple chores.



"I'm a huge advocate for in-home care because it keeps people out of facilities, and it keeps them in the place that they love," said Sandra Barker of DisAbility Partners in Jackson County. "We see better

outcomes if seniors get to stay in their known environment. Privacy, dignity, all of those things that you get when you're in your own home, those things can be maintained longer. And just wellness overall."

It may feel awkward to have a stranger coming into your home initially, but having someone to socialize with is often one of the greatest benefits.

"You're getting a person solely committed to you, and there's just nothing like it," Barker said.

The in-home care provider may also be the only person checking on an older adult's well-being on a regular basis. According to Barker, great care is taken in matching seniors with in-home care providers.

"When you interview them, you have to look at a lot of areas to see who would be a good fit. You think about the senior's personality and get to know them. And then you think about the aid they need," Barker said. "Once you put the thought into it like that, it helps. And if the client doesn't feel like it's a good fit, we switch it around."

## Types of In-Home Care

There are several different types and levels of in-home care available. Services can range from light housekeeping, meal preparation, and running errands to personal care like bathing, feeding, and dressing, as well as home health care recommended by a physician.

- **In-Home Aide, level 1:** Light-housekeeping and chores, like laundry, cooking and cleaning, as well as running errands.

- **In-Home Aide level 2:** Personal care services that can include bathing, feeding, dressing and toileting.

- **Home Health:** Clinical care including medication management, changing bandages or therapy.

## In-Home Care assistance

Seniors who qualify for Medicaid may receive in-home care through the Community Alternatives Program, a cost-effective alternative to placement in a long-term care facility. Depending on your situation, the cost may be covered or partly covered.

The contact for the Community Alternatives Program for each county can be found in the directory starting on page 36 under "Home Health and In-Home Services."

In-Home Care is sometimes covered or partly reimbursed by private long-term care insurance.

For private pay options, contact the local senior center in your county. Most keep a list of in-home aid providers they can share upon request.





# On-the-job training program offers seniors a path to employment



For older adults, re-entering the workforce or looking for a new job can feel overwhelming.

“Things are changing so rapidly, the workforce can be really intimidating for older adults who have been out of the workforce for a while. Coming back in can be very daunting,” said Lisa Loftis, executive director of State of Franklin Health Council.

Thankfully, there’s a program to help seniors in the seven western counties on their path to employment. The Senior Community Service Employment Program offers work-based job training for low-income, unemployed seniors.

Seniors are matched with a host agency that provides support and training while learning to navigate today’s workplace.

“They are able to acquire new on-the-job skills and gain confidence to get back in the workforce,” Loftis said. “Seniors not only gain tangible

experience, but benefit socially and financially. It serves as a launching board.”

Host employers include nonprofits, community service organizations and local government agencies.

“We try to find a fit for them that’s close to home and matches their interests,” Loftis said.

The program is intended as a stepping stone.

“The goal is for them to be integrated back into the workforce within four years,” Loftis said.

Participants work an average of 20 hours a week. They must be 55 or over and meet income qualifications.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program is available throughout the seven western counties and is managed by the State of Franklin Health Council (housed in the Swain County Senior Center). To learn more, call 828-488-3047 or visit [stateoffranklin.org](http://stateoffranklin.org).

## Make a difference as a Senior Companion

Seniors interested in serving as companions to fellow seniors — from running errands to preparing simple meals — can earn a tax-free stipend under Mountain Project’s Senior Companions Program.

In addition to driving seniors to the grocery store, hair appointments and other errands, companions help around the home with tasks like cleaning out the fridge, reading the mail or just visiting. These small acts often make the difference in a senior being able to stay in their own home.

Senior Companions find the role highly rewarding.

“It keeps them busy, they have

social interaction and it gives them a sense of purpose,” said Mick Trostel, coordinator of the Senior Companion Program for the seven western counties.

There’s a large need for volunteers, as the program has a waiting list of clients. Senior Companions not only serve as a lifeline for routine tasks, but also combat loneliness and isolation that come from living alone.

The volunteer benefits from the new-found friendship, as well.

“It breaks social isolation for both the volunteer and the client,” Trostel said. “Instead of sitting at home, they enjoy making a friend and helping someone who needs them.”

Senior Companions must be at least 55 years old and able to vol-

unteer between 15 and 40 hours a week. They are paid a tax-free hourly stipend of \$4 and travel reimbursement of 70 cents a mile, as well as receiving paid an-

nual leave and sick leave.

For information on becoming a Senior Companion in the seven western counties, contact Mountain Projects at 828-356-2800.





# Fixed-income seniors could be eligible for help

## *Learn about the options*

### Home modifications

Getting around inevitably becomes more difficult as we age. If routine daily life — like getting to the mailbox or taking a shower — becomes insurmountable, home modifications can help. Every county has a home modification assistance program. Sometimes, the fix can be as simple as grab bars in the bathroom and hallways. Ramps, a more challenging addition, are often needed following a fall, a broken hip, surgery or a stroke.

Home modification could also include repairs, weatherization or installing smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, including ones with strobe lights for the hearing impaired. Find the home modification number under your county in the directory listings.

### Staying warm and keeping cool

Heating and cooling costs can be a struggle for seniors on fixed incomes.

*Continued on page 12*



Ramps can make all the difference for folks to remain in their own home. Volunteers lend a hand through Project CARE with the Jackson County Department on Aging.

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- Caregiver List for Haywood County
- Creative Living Programs/Trips
- Disability Partners
- Ensure Nutrition Program
- Foster Grandparents
- Haywood/Jackson Volunteer Center
- Information & Assistance
- In-Home Services

- MemoryCare
- Nutrition Meal Sites
- Phone Assurance Program
- Project Lifesaver
- Senior Companion Program
- SHIP—Senior's Health Insurance Information Program
- Vaya Health - Geriatric Team

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## Assistance Programs

Nonprofits, churches and senior agencies offer additional programs in some communities, as well — which can include free fans to stay cool in summer, firewood to help heat your home in the winter or help paying for heating oil. Contact the senior center in your county to get pointed in the right direction.

Also, check with the social services department in your county to see if you qualify for the following energy assistance programs:

- **The Crisis Intervention Program** provides assistance in the event of a heating or cooling crisis that poses a life-threatening or health-related emergency.
- **The Low Income Energy Assistance Program** provides a one-time payment toward heating costs for eligible households.

### Food pantries

There's a wide variety of food assistance for seniors who need help stocking their cupboards and fridge. Churches and nonprofits run food

pantries throughout the region, from weekly food boxes to monthly distributions of staples. To find out what food pantries are available in your community, call the senior center for your county listed in the resource directory.

### Medicaid-based assistance

The following programs are available to those who first qualify for Medicaid. For eligibility, contact your local Department of Social Services listed in the resource directory.

- **Assisted Living:** The Special Assistance Program helps pay for an assisted living facility. To be eligible, individuals must be age 65 or older or disabled.
- **Skilled Nursing Facilities:** Medicaid benefits can help cover the cost of long-term care in a skilled nursing facility, based on an income versus cost-of-care formula. The recipient must be able to use some of their income to help pay for the cost of care, and Medicaid will pay the remainder directly to the facility.
- **In-Home Care:** The Special



Many churches and nonprofits provide free food for seniors, including choose-your-own grocery style selections, like The Friendship House at First United Methodist in Waynesville.

Assistance In-Home Program helps provide in-home care, allowing people to remain in their home in lieu of entering a long-term care facility. The Community Alternatives Program also provides assistance for in-home care.

- **Medicare Savings Program:** This program helps low-income se-

niors on Medicare pay for their premiums, deductibles and coinsurance.

- **Medical Transportation:** Qualifying seniors can get help paying for transportation to and from their medical appointments, typically in partnership with the transit program in your county.

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# Supporting quality of life for seniors and caregivers takes a holistic approach

## *Grant funding propels work of Area Agency on Aging to the next level*

A new initiative is being launched in the seven western counties aimed at enhancing the quality of life for seniors and their caregivers living in rural areas.

The “Rural Connections for Elders” project is an extension of the work at the heart of the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging.

“To best serve our older adults and caregivers, we need to meet them where they are, listen and provide them with the resources to attain their aspirations,” said AAA Director Sarajane Melton. “It is not about us — it is about them! Culture shifts are hard and slow

in human service agencies, but with the willingness and flexibility of the AAA staff that mission has been embraced and is a part of any conversation that we have related to the work we do.”

Melton and her staff have worked diligently over the years with the limited resources available for their work supporting rural older adults and caregivers to age safely in place, building a holistic person-centered program serving the seven far west counties.

Now, those efforts are being rewarded with sizeable funding to launch Rural Connections for Elders. The project has received grant funding from the

Mental Health Division of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

“This project is a significant step forward in providing essential resources and support to our elderly population, who often face unique challenges due to geographical isolation,” Melton said.

Rural Connections for Elders has three primary components to promote physical and emotional well-being among older adults and the crucial, underserved rural workforce caring for them.

• **Prevention and early intervention:** Programs targeting underserved populations to reduce the incidence of mental health disorders, improve early detection, and facilitate timely access to care.

• **Forging personal connections:**

Monthly in-person connection events at senior centers, with transportation and meals coordinated with existing contractors for community engagement and peer support.

• **Supporting caregivers:** An extensive Family Caregiver and in-home aide respite program complete with background checks and vouchers to pay for respite providers.

“Our mission at the Southwestern Commission is to improve the quality of life in the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina. With over 30% of our population over the age of 65, any effort to address key issues must take into account the needs of this population,” said Russ Harris, executive director of Southwestern Commission. “This grant will help us sustain and expand services for older adults.”

## Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging



*Working to improve the quality of life for older adults in Western North Carolina by providing services and assistance through*

- Long Term Care Ombudsman Program
- Family Caregiver Support Program
- Information and Resources
- Legal Services Program
- Health & Community Education
- Digital Literacy

For more information please call the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging @ 828-586-1962 or visit us online @ [www.regiona.org](http://www.regiona.org)



Ad35627



# Standing in the gap, connecting the dots

## *Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging bridges mountain region*



Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging staff (from left): Lisa Allen, Kellie Dula Handoo, Nadia Blow, Jeanne Mathews, Sarajane Melton, Anna Franklin, Tori Treadway and Pat Baker.

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging serves as an umbrella organization bridging the vast network of senior programs and resources across the seven western counties. Staff of the Area Agency on Aging wear many hats: connecting the public with services in their communities, advising and supporting partner agencies, overseeing state and federal programs at the local level, and advocating for senior resources.

The AAA provides the scaffolding that the region's senior services and programs are built upon. It also serves as an important voice for older adults — advocating for seniors to be included in the conversation when addressing social issues.

"The AAA aging network needs to be at the table for every concern in the region, whether it is hous-

ing or broadband or mental health or substance abuse. Those aren't age-specific issues, but the dynamic is often different for the older adult population," said Sarajane Melton, director of the Southwestern Commission AAA. "We need to look at issues through that lens to ensure we find the right solutions. But it doesn't always get brought up unless we are at the table."

The AAA played a critical role as a support network for older adults during the pandemic — something it was perfectly positioned to do given its decades of experience. The AAA team helped organizations pivot to providing no-contact services.

"We got a lot of calls from our providers asking 'What do we do? How do we make this work?'" Melton recalled. "It was a collab-

orative effort. If something was working in one county, it was 'Tell us what you're doing and we'll see if it could work in another county.'"

Sharing solutions and best practices is the foundation of the AAA, after all.

"We are that bridge across the region," Melton said.

That role came into play again as the pandemic eased. Unwinding the new normal of Covid and getting back to the old normal has been critical to bring seniors out of isolation and to connect with the larger community once more.

Finding new and better ways of providing services to older adults is paramount to the AAA mission.

For example, the AAA recently led the introduction of a new model for in-home aid, a service for older adults who need help with routine

tasks and self-care in order to remain in their own home. The new model allows seniors to choose their own caregivers rather than be limited to a list of pre-approved providers, known as "consumer directed in-home aid."

## *Additional resources and programs*

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging serves as a liaison for many of the federal, state and local programs and services for older adults across the seven western counties.

Here are a few programs managed directly by the Area Agency



on Aging not covered elsewhere in this publication.

For more information on any of these programs, call the AAA at 828-586-1962 or visit [www.regiona.org/aaa-2](http://www.regiona.org/aaa-2).

## Senior Legal Support

There's a host of legal documents that are important for seniors to have on hand, from a living will to power of attorney. The Area Agency on Aging provides funding for an older adult to prepare a single legal document of their choice.

The service is intended to get seniors thinking about the future and help them get their affairs in place should the unexpected arise.

"We feel like it is important for folks' wishes to be expressed, and the best way to make sure they are carried out is to have a written legal document that specifies it," explained Sarajane Melton, director of the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging.

The AAA connects seniors to an elder law attorney in their county.

The legal paperwork is handled confidentially by the attorney and client, while the AAA picks up the bill. There is no income qualification to be eligible for the service, however, there is an application process.

## Senior Medicare Patrol

Medicare scams are a big business, with an estimated \$9 billion in Medicare fraud and abuse carried out in the U.S. each year. Scams often involve billing senior's Medicare accounts for services or products they didn't authorize.

Senior Medicare Patrol aims to inform seniors about the potential for scams and red flags to look for. The AAA also presents programs to community groups on request on how to avoid scams.

The Area Agency on Aging also serves as a clearinghouse to help seniors avoid other types of scams. If you've been a victim of a scam, the AAA can point you to the proper entity to investigate and rectify it.

## Long-term Care Ombudsman

If you have a concern involving

a long-term care facility, the Area Agency on Aging can help mediate or resolve the issue through its ombudsman program. The ombudsman serves as the liaison for the Long-Term Care Community Advisory Committee in each of the seven western counties.

Complaints can be shared anonymously, or the AAA Regional Ombudsman can work cooperatively with families and the facility on specific situations. Long-term care facilities include nursing homes, assisted living facilities and family care homes.



The Area Agency on Aging hosts an annual Seniors Celebration to celebrate the golden years for the seven western counties.

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# Come one, come all!

*Senior Games serves up a win-win of fun activity and social connections*

Hundreds of seniors across the seven western counties eagerly anticipate the friendly competition and camaraderie of the Senior Games every April.

From croquet to cornhole, table tennis to pickleball, swimming to cycling — there are over 30 events for seniors ages 50 plus to participate in during the Senior Games.

“Don’t let the fear of trying something new hold you back. The Senior Games are all about having fun, staying active, and celebrating what our bodies can do — no matter your age or experience level,” said Haywood County recreation director Elli Flagg. “The supportive community is all about encouraging each other, and you’ll be surprised at how empowering it feels to take that first step.”

It’s not too late to get back in the swing of your favorite sport — or try your hand at a new one.

The Senior Games is your chance to rekindle an interest in a sport or activity you did when you were younger — but senior style. Instead of basketball or softball, for example, there’s a basketball



Pickleball is a wildly popular event in the Haywood County Senior Games.

toss and softball throw.

There’s swimming, archery and bocce ball, along with pleasure pastimes, like horseshoes, bowling and minigolf. Try your hand

at table games like bridge, hearts, poker and Mah Jong.

Feeling athletic? Go out for traditional track and field events like discus and long jump, or cardio

games like badminton and pickleball.

To anyone who worries they aren’t good enough or fit enough — think again. It’s all about having



Haywood County Senior Games participants enjoy a lively game of hearts.

## Get crafty with the Silver Arts

The Silver Arts is a companion to Senior Games, offering an outlet to showcase arts, crafts, music, and even literary flare.

Silver Arts is offered in many of the seven western counties. Submissions are displayed on exhibit for judges as well as the general public to view, coinciding with the month of Senior Games.

Silver Arts categories can

vary by county but some of the options include: photography, drawing, oil, pastel, mixed media, acrylic, watercolor, sculpting, basketry, crochet, knitting, jewelry, needlework, pottery, quilting, stained glass, weaving, woodcarving, woodworking, literary (essay, poem, short Stories, life experiences) and performing arts (acting, dance, vocal, instrument, and line dancing).

Check with your county coordinator for more information.





Suit up for swimming competitions during the Senior Games, shown here at the Waynesville Recreation Center.

fun.

“Senior Games proves that age is just a number when it comes to living life to the fullest,” Flagg said. “You don’t have to be an athlete — you just need to show up and give it a go.”

While the games themselves are great, the friendships forged over the years keep participants coming back — like an annual reunion of sorts. Senior Games pro-

vides social interaction and community spirit, with participants looking forward to their return each spring.

“Even if you don’t come out for the sports, come out for the people,” Flagg said.

The annual Senior Games also proves that just because you’re at a golden age doesn’t mean you can’t become a gold medalist. Many Senior Games participants

do well enough locally to go on to the state games in Raleigh, and several invariably make it all the way to nationals.

The games are grouped by age class in five-year increments, from 50 all the way up to 100+. There may only be three people in an age class for a given activity, which means everyone medals.

Venues for the Senior Games encompass public park settings and recreation facilities in each county. Senior Game registration is held in mid-March each year, with the games occurring mid-March through mid-April.

Registering for the Senior Games is easy. Go to [torch.ncseniorgames.org](http://torch.ncseniorgames.org), create an account, choose your county, then pick the activities you want to participate in.

Mark your calendar for next March and contact the Senior Games to join the fun!

## How to play

Senior Games registration is held in mid-March every year. Go to [torch.ncseniorgames.org](http://torch.ncseniorgames.org), create an account, choose your county, then pick the activities you want to participate in.

Got questions or want to learn more? Contacts for each county are listed here.

### Cherokee and Clay

828-837-2467

### Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

828-359-6895

### Graham County

828-479-7977

### Haywood County

828-452-6789

### Jackson County

828-631-8032

### Macon County

828-349-2093

### Swain County

828-488-9273 ext 2002

*Continued on page 18*



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# Beyond the podium

*For these participants, Senior Games mean community more than medals*

## Pickleball prowess and more

Linda Knowles, a resident of Cherokee County, “wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Knowles has been rocking the Senior Games for eight years, ever since she started playing pickleball and first heard of the event.

“My favorite part of the games is getting to know others better, the laughter — and, of course, the fun competition,” she said.

Knowles is a multi-sport athlete and competes in pickleball, football and softball throw, basketball shooting, walking, horseshoes, shuffleboard, cornhole and more. And she urges seniors not to be afraid to try something new.

“It charges you mentally and emotionally, and you meet new friends,” she said. “Participating keeps me young at heart, and the health benefits are a plus. The games are fun, and so is the closing banquet.”

Knowles hopes to play in the games for many more years.

“Seeing those who are much older than me and still competing is an inspiration,” she said. “I want to be like them when I grow up.”

## Winning is optional; fun is mandatory

Cherokee County athlete Dave Baumann has participated since



Dave Baumann of Andrews

2011 in tennis, track, pickleball, power walk, badminton, and horseshoes — and plans to add bowling this year.

The Andrews resident ran cross country in high school, but nowadays, the only running he does is while playing tennis and pickleball.

“Yes, I’m fairly athletic, but if you’re not, join the senior games anyway,” he said. “You don’t have to win. Come have fun, and you’ll feel better afterward. It’s surprising what people who thought they couldn’t do it achieve in the games; it’s like a little pat on the back.”

And there’s the social benefit. Baumann has met a lot of seniors through the games, and they get together for pickleball on the regular.

Baumann, a Silver Arts participant, and his wife enjoy the closing banquet, where he sings and plays keyboards.

“If I can do the games at age 78, you can, too,” he said.

## No sight, no problem

Carrie Laney, 95, began her career in the Senior Games in 2019 and has entered every year since then. She’s an amazing participant, especially since her macular degeneration recently progressed and took almost all her eyesight.

The Robbinsville resident only sees shadows and outlines but doesn’t let that slow her down. She took second place in her age group in the state competition, having to ask, “Did it go in?” after every throw. She’d never tossed the bag before participating in the Senior Games, making her podium spot even more impressive.

Laney said she loves everything about the Games. She competes in football toss, softball throw, and fun walk, in addition to her winning sport, corn hole.



Jackson County Senior Games participants



Linda Knowles of Murphy

Laney enjoys trying new things and meeting new people.

“We have a wonderful time and it is so important to stay active,” she said. “Please join us and sign up for everything.”

## New knee means bocce spree

Haywood County resident Ruth Elson brings a little old-school Olympic style to the Games by participating in shot put and discus. Discus was all new to her, but lo and behold won a medal the first year she gave it a whirl, metaphorically speaking that is.

“I don’t spin around and around. I just rear back and sling,” Elson said. “I thought ‘You know, there aren’t that many in my age group, so I’ll give it a try.’”

Hailing from Clyde, Elson also competes in pickleball, bocce, table tennis, shuffleboard and badminton. Senior Games only rolls around



A 94 year old blind woman who participates in senior games



Ruth Elson of Clyde

once a year, so why not do it all?

She’s always enjoyed sporting events but especially likes the camaraderie among the players.

“I had never tried bocce before,” Elson said. “Entering is not for medals — it’s for fun and meeting new people. Just try to get out there and have fun.”

In addition to her participation in the local Games, she’s also competed and medaled in shuffleboard in the National Senior Games.

Elson encourages men and women to participate in the games and keep moving.

“It’s a nice community effort, whether you try the sporting events or the creative Silver Arts,” she said. “There are all kinds of things to do in the Senior Games.”

## Gridiron in the blood

Lynn Milner, also from Haywood County, comes from an active family. With her dad being a profes-



sional football player, she remembers “playing everything and being called a ‘tomboy,’ but “now they’re called ‘athletes.’”

“Maybe I have a little edge on the Senior Games football throw event,” she said, referencing her football heritage. “But I enter a lot — pickleball, badminton, basketball shoot, billiards, bocce, corn hole, croquet, horseshoes, mini golf, shuffleboard and table tennis.”

She challenges the misconception that one needs to be an athlete to enjoy the Games. Her athlete father Bill Milner actually medaled in the Silver Arts creative category.

“The Games are not just physical and mental,” the Waynesville resident said. “They’re social events where you meet old and new friends and have a good time.”

Milner went to the National Senior Games in table tennis, where she didn’t medal, but had a great time in a high level of competition.

### Art and archery

Annie Harlow didn’t start as a



Annie Harlow of Sylva

Senior Games athlete. She first entered the Games through Silver Arts creative projects, displaying skills she spent a lifetime honing.

“I got involved with the performing arts — playing piano duets with my sister, submitting quilts, baskets, photography, and a short story. My sister and I medaled in piano, and I got an honorable mention for my short story,” the Jackson County senior said.

But then she heard about the many Senior Games sports on offer, some of which she enjoyed as a teen and young adult.

“I want to try archery, which I did as a kid,” she said. “Now that the rec center has opened pools, I hope to enter swimming. It’s going to be exciting.”

“The games keep me physically, mentally, and creatively engaged,” Harlow, a resident of Sylva, said. “It keeps me interacting with people — and sometimes — I win.”

Harlow urges everyone to get involved.

“There are so many ways to participate — just to do it,” she said. “There is fun all the way around.”

### Cornhole community

Mike and Karen Townsend, of Franklin in Macon County, love the fellowship of the Senior Games. After hearing about it from church friends, they tried the games and now partake each year. In fact, Mike is now the president of the Games in his home county.

More than 100 people participate in the Macon County games. Mike said there is no need to have skill to enter the games.



Lynn Milner (center) of Haywood County sizes up the shuffleboard competition.

“I didn’t even know what corn hole was before the games. The competition isn’t cutthroat, win-at-all-costs. It’s fellowship,” he said.

Shuffleboard or corn hole attracts participants with handicaps or physical limitations, Mike said.

Karen noted aside from the events, with the small entry fee, participants get extras like T-shirts and access to events like an ice cream social, an opening ceremony luncheon, and a fun Christmas banquet.

## Medicare got you asking questions? SHIIP has answers.

The Seniors’ Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) has experts specially trained to answer your Medicare questions and to help you with other insurance issues important to seniors, such as:

- selecting a Medicare prescription drug plan
- preventing a Medicare billing fraud and abuse
- choosing a Medicare supplement plan
- long-term care insurance



**In Macon County, call the Crawford Senior Center at 828-349-2059 to talk to a trained SHIIP counselor or schedule a one-on-one meeting.**



# Closing the gap on the ‘Digital Divide’

By Carol Viau

Are you a senior citizen struggling to keep up with the fast-paced world of technology? You’re not alone. With advancements in technology happening daily, it can be overwhelming for older adults to stay up to date.

Digital skills are essential for seniors and their caregivers — they provide a gateway to connection, enrichment and empowerment. By embracing technology and developing digital skills, seniors can stay connected with their families and communities, unlock opportunities, manage finances and bills and lead more fulfilling lives in our digitized society.

“Technology has progressed over time, and while not intentionally excluding them, seniors haven’t been provided the skills to build confidence using technology,” said Tori Treadway, Digital Navigator with the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging.

Even though the digital divide may seem wide, strategies and resources exist for seniors to make their golden years even brighter by plugging in to the digital world.



Thanks to technology, a 90-year-old Swain County grandmother stays connected with her twin grandsons who live out of town.

## Bridging the divide

Through educational and improving access, the divide can be bridged and quality of life for seniors enhanced. Digital technology help for seniors is actively being developed in

WNC.

Most senior centers serve as a local resource by offering technology classes, workshops or drop-in help sessions.

The Clay County Senior Center launched digital technology classes last year, covering basic operation of smart phones and laptops.

“The seniors loved it,” said Becky Grindstaff, director of the Clay

County Senior Center. “It was good for the seniors to start at the beginning: turning on the power button, answering emails, taking selfies, uploading photos, sending texts and using thumb drives.”

The classes are made possible by a partnership with Tri-County Community College and a digital literacy grant obtained by the Area Agency on Aging — which even



Digital literacy is within reach. The Clay County Senior Center has offered classes in basic digital technology. Pictured at the completion are, from left: Angela West, Tri-County CC instructor; student Judy Nigels, Clay County; and Callie Redford, Tri-County CC director of College & Career Readiness.

## What is the Digital Divide?

The term “digital divide” refers to the disparity between people who have access to information and communication technology and those who do not.

For seniors, this gap can hinder their ability to stay connected with others, access necessary services and simply navigate society.

Just about everything is online these days — shopping, paying bills, signing up for services,

booking travel, managing accounts — not to mention personal connections like photo sharing, social media and video calls.

Digital technology can reduce feelings of isolation among older adults, contributing to healthy aging.

Most adults and children take the internet for granted, knowing its vast knowledge at the fingertips. But seniors didn’t grow up with this technology, and many are daunted to dive in.



provided free laptops.

“The class was very enjoyable,” said Clay County resident Judy Nigels, who completed the class last year. “It really helped us, and learning how to use thumb drives to transfer information between devices was very helpful.”

There is the “fun” aspect of learning digital technology, too.

Instructor Angela West assigned seniors homework, such as finding a pretty flower in the yard, taking a selfie with it, then emailing the photo to her.

“It was so much fun for them to do that,” said Grindstaff. “It’s something we all take for granted.”

Future classes in Clay County will cover making Zoom calls (a important tool in the growing telehealth world), awareness about scam emails and even paying taxes online.

“Seniors need to learn to pay attention to possible scams if they click unknown emails and texts,” Grindstaff said.

Based on the success in Clay County, Treadway is working toward AAA digital technology workshops in all seven counties. Tread-

way stressed the importance of “meeting seniors where they are.” If they want to keep their flip phone, that’s alright. If they want to learn just their phone and not move onto a laptop, that’s fine, too.

Treadway shared a personal success story with her 90-year-old grandmother.

“I’ve tutored my grandmother so that she can learn her phone and the TV. But most seniors don’t have someone at home to teach them. That’s why we’re developing the workshop program,” Treadway said.

People who grew up with technology, or learned it along the way, rely on the internet for everyday tasks. Promoting computer literacy for seniors can open the door to a wealth of information including online news sources, digital libraries, educational websites, online courses and overall cognitive stimulation.

### Emerging Telehealth services

Newer technology providing access to online health resources is being developed as well. Seniors may not be entirely comfortable utilizing telehealth services — either not trusting that an online appointment is as good as in-person, or not having operational knowledge.

A pilot program is in development by the AAA and a health provider in Haywood County. While not operational yet, it will give the physician’s patients direct accessibility to the nurse practitioner for a quick routine checkup, prescription refills or meds needed quickly.

There are practical benefits for seniors and caregivers if they can get medical attention without having to drive to an appointment.

“After last fall’s hurricane, we were saddened to hear about seniors who couldn’t get routine medications after the storm,” Treadway said. “Once the pilot telehealth program is running, and seniors develop trust in the system, it will make routine health care easier.”



Local teens offer digital help for their elders at the Macon County Senior Center.

### Local resources

Seniors and their families are encouraged to ask their local senior center for help with technology and classes for instruction.

For example, the Canton and Waynesville branches of the Haywood County Public Library offer

regular drop-in tech sessions, covering everything from how to create an email account, connect to wifi or troubleshooting device issues.

Stay tuned for classes being developed by the AAA in the seven western counties, tailored to the demographics of each county.



Southwestern AAA Digital Navigator Tori Treadway (right) passes out literature on resources to get connected.


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# Think outside the fitness box

## *New ways to get moving and boost brain power*

We all know the importance of exercise and staying active as we age: it maintains mobility, muscle mass, cardio health, stamina, balance, mental outlook, weight and the list goes on. The key is finding an activity or form of exercise that interests you — one that can be embraced as part of your lifestyle rather than feeling like a chore.

“Try everything once and figure out what you enjoy the most. When

you find that special sauce, that’s what will keep you coming back,” said Laura Rodi, health & wellness manager at the Jackson County Senior Center.

Moving more starts with simply getting up from your chair.

around your living room or walk up and down your stairs. You don’t have to show up at a gym or have special equipment,” said Shannon Royce, family agent with the Swain

County Cooperative Extension.

But staying motivated can be tough. If you need an incentive, tap into programs at your local senior center, recreation center or gym.

“Typically there is a social component so that adds to the enjoyment,” Rodi said.

Remember, it was everyone’s first day at some point, so don’t be bashful.

“Walking in the first time can be very intimidating. People get very self-conscious about fitness, but nobody is watching. You don’t have to be good at this stuff,” Rodi said.

What’s more, you’re boosting brain elasticity, memory and cognitive functioning — all of which decline as a normal part of aging.

“When you show up and you’re moving, you’re already winning,” Royce added.



## DrumFIT: Get in the groove

DrumFIT is a new fitness trend catching on among seniors, and for good reason.

“It uses physical exercise, cognitive stimulation and music to help seniors stay active and social,” said Stephanie Stroupe, Cherokee County Senior Services program manager.

Using drum sticks and an exercise ball, you play along to rhythms, working both your body and your brain in the process. Performed either standing or sitting, DrumFIT can be tailored to a wide range of fitness levels. Plus, it’s fun.

“Some of the seniors have said DrumFIT has helped with their attitudes, making them happier during and after the class,” said Stroupe. “They have also said that

it gets them moving more, as well as helping them to be more active — not only physically, but also socially.”

The Penland Senior Center in Murphy has DrumFIT classes three times a week, and they’ve become a favorite with local seniors.

DrumFIT has been proven to help combat loneliness, as it offers a sense of community through synchronized exercise. It also exercises the brain’s timing systems and encourages neural connections.

“It can take a bit to catch on to the patterns. Sometimes you lose track, and they look at me and I’m messing up too, but everyone is having fun and laughing,” said Shannon Royce, who teaches DrumFIT at the Swain Senior Center. “It checks off so many boxes with memory and music and movement.”



*Continued on page 24* Seniors catch the rhythm of DrumFit at the Swain County Senior Center.

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Laura Rodi helps seniors unlock the mental and physical benefits of tai chi at the Jackson County Senior Center.

## Tai chi: *Go with the flow*

While tai chi looks calm and relaxing, make no mistake: it serves up a dose of fitness in the process.

“There’s constantly more research and data around the benefits of tai chi,” said Laura Rodi, who teaches tai chi classes at the Jackson County Senior Center. “It’s especially good for improving

your balance. Fall prevention is a big thing for older adults and tai chi helps with that.”

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese martial art often described as “meditation in motion.”

“It’s very much like a dance. One week we learn a move and the next week we add on to the move,” Rodi said. “It is also very good for your memory. You really can’t think of anything else while you are doing tai chi. You have to be completely focused on what you are doing.”



Bingocize serves up all the fun of bingo with a side of physical activity.

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## Bingocize: *Make it fun*

Shannon Royce is always excited to try a new activity with her seniors at the Swain County Senior Center — especially one that sneaks a little fitness in with a game, the way mom used to sneak vegetables into casseroles. So when she heard of Bingocize, she jumped at it.

“It combines playing Bingo with an exercise component and fall prevention education,” Royce said.

It starts out innocently enough.

“We’ll call three Bingo numbers, then do a couple exercises. Then we do four more numbers, and now we do three more exercises,” Royce said.

Meanwhile, the exercises get progressively more challenging each week.

“The exercises they did while seated they started to do standing. Then we start to incorporate resistance bands into the exercises,” Royce said.

Along the way, she slides in a few fall prevention questions. But it still packs the same punch as a lively Bingo game.

“Whoever invented this was a genius,” she said. “They love it.”



# Senior Tar Heel Legislature provides essential voice for seniors

By Carol Viau

With one in five N.C. residents age 65 or older, seniors need a strong and effective voice to ensure issues important to seniors are front-and-center on state lawmakers' agenda.

Meet the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature: volunteer senior delegates from across the state's 100 counties who work in partnership with the N.C. General Assembly.

"There is strength in numbers. As one unified voice, we can change the perspective of what it means to age," said Judi Donovan, a Senior Tarheel representative from Haywood County. "The team is a conduit to assess legislative needs of older adults."

Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) delegates convene in Raleigh for the annual working "legislature," but work locally throughout the year to discuss and develop an agenda, which is then carried to the General Assembly.

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging serves as the coordinator for STHL for the seven westernmost counties.

"I'm proud of the attention they have brought to important senior priorities," said Lisa Allen, Area Agency on Aging health and community educator and liaison for STHL delegates. "I have so much respect for our STHL delegates, representing their counties and working together. When we go to meetings in Raleigh, this hard-working group stands out."

The STHL develops a set of priorities important to seniors' quality of life, and advocates for them to the N.C. General Assembly.



Members of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature advocate for the interests of senior citizens and community needs with the NC General Assembly. Representing WNC at a Raleigh meeting (back row from left): Gayle Woody, Jackson County; Judi Donovan, Haywood County; Cathy Yost, Cherokee County; Pat Hedrick, Macon County; Lisa Allen, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging; (front row) Beverly White, Cherokee County; Charlotte Cowan, Jackson County.

"The work of the STHL is a way of getting senior citizens' needs front and center with our state legislators," said Gayle Woody, Jackson County alternate. "It's our collective tax money — we just need to advocate for funneling it into different places."

Indeed, one focus area is making sure lawmakers fund programs and services utilized by seniors.

"From securing funds for adult protective services, supporting Medicaid expansion, to being able to offer a variety of programs at senior centers, the group is making a difference," said Donovan.

To be effective, STHL delegates develop a working knowledge of what

## What is the Senior Tar Heel Legislature?

The Senior Tar Heel Legislature was created by the state legislature in 1993. Goals included:

- To promote citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues;
- To assess legislative needs of older citizens in a forum modeled after the General Assembly.

There is one STHL delegate, age 60 or older, from each N.C. county; most counties also have an alternate delegate. The delegates vote on priorities to advocate for each year.

The 2025-26 priorities include: adult protective services, senior centers, grants for home and community care, older adult housing, long-term care ombudsman and nursing home staffing standards.

The NC Division of Aging and Adult Services provides staff support for the STHL, working with the state's 17 area agencies on aging.

Contact Lisa Allen with the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging to learn about becoming a STHL delegate. [llallen@regiona.org](mailto:llallen@regiona.org) or 828-586-1962 ext. 221.



Continued on page 26



# *Senior Tar Heel Legislature delegates share a passion for advocating for seniors. Here are a few of their stories.*

### Lending a voice

Pat Hedrick, Macon County STHL delegate, has always been a strong advocate for anyone with needs in the population.

“I’ve always tried to reach out and improve services and quality of life for groups of people who need a voice,” she said.

In the year she’s served as STHL delegate, she’s impressed that the group is well recognized by the General Assembly.

“It’s a valuable connection — the state General Assembly addresses long-term care and senior living, and the members are great supporters for local senior centers as we request funding for programs needed,” she said.

In her STHL role, Hedrick has met with state and U.S. Congressional representatives, county commissioners and the county manager advocating for a new senior center.

“As a delegate, whenever I call government representatives, they seem to respect the voice of the STHL,” Hedrick said.

She became a delegate in large part due to her passion for improvements in long-term care. When she had a loved-one in an assisted living facility, Hedrick made her concerns known to the long-term care ombudsman program, part of the Area Agency on Aging services.

### Lending experience

Gayle Woody has been in lawmakers shoes, trying to figure out how to balance the interests and projects competing for money. As a former Jackson County Commissioner, she knows there is only “so much revenue to be dispersed” in programs.

The growing senior demographic in the region inspired to become a STHL delegate. In addition to our own aging population, retirees from across the country are attracted to the mountains.

Woody stresses that retirement doesn’t mean the people are inactive.

“The seniors here are active and they are volunteering,” Woody said.

Her special concern centers on accessible recreation as people age. Woody knows that recreation not only provides needed physical activity, but also, it provides a place for socialization.

“We need greenways and walking paths,” she said. “I walk on the greenway along the Tuckasegee River and have a friend who was using a walker on the greenway. This type of recreation and social interaction helped improve her well-being.”

### Lending passion

For Judi Donovan, every day of working with older adults was rewarding and enlightening during her career in the senior living field. She now puts that passion to use as a STHL alternate delegate for Haywood County.

“It’s important to understand that aging is not a cookie-cutter process,” Donovan said. “We need to be flexible and supportive when identifying practical solutions to meet the needs of aging seniors.”

In addition to educating lawmakers, STHL delegates also raise awareness among the senior community.

“By working collectively to promote citizen involvement and being present in the community, we provide information, resources and educational opportunities about the General Assembly legislative process,” she said.

Since she had extensive experience as executive director within a continuing care retirement community, Donovan advises seniors to make a plan for the future.

“Have a plan in place for your future health needs and communicate your plan, because if we don’t have a plan, someone else will be making the decisions for us,” she said.



Beverly White, Cherokee County Delegate, and Judi Donovan, Haywood County alternate, advocate for seniors at the Senior Tar Heel Legislature in Raleigh.



Lisa Allen, STHL Liaison and AAA Health and Community Educator, and Gayle Woody, Jackson County alternate delegate, actively participate at a Senior Tar Heel Raleigh meeting.





Go-getter Charlotte Cowan, Jackson County delegate (at left) has served on the STHL for multiple terms. She enjoyed the Senior Celebration in Bryson City with Sue Evans and Debbie Hage, both retired Public Health Nurses from Jackson Co., all actively advocating for seniors in the community.

those programs and services are and how they are delivered.

“We collaborate with organizations to heighten the awareness of what it means to age successfully and provide the community with resources to ensure success,” Donovan said. “There is a critical need to evaluate access to services needed for successful aging.”

## Join the STHL

What does it take to become a STHL delegate? Hedrick advises getting involved in senior causes.

“Find an area of your life that has touched you — one that you might have knowledge about,” Hedrick said. “Even though we’re retired, we (older adults) still have our knowledge to give.”

Understanding the needs of seniors is the first step to conveying those needs to lawmakers.

“Look around your neighborhood,” added Donovan. “Do you know anyone that is home bound? Is there someone that could benefit from Meals on Wheels? At the end of the day, making a difference in the lives of

others is what matters. The community needs you.”

STHL delegate and/or alternate positions are open in Clay, Swain, Graham, Jackson and Macon counties. Contact Lisa Allen with the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging to learn about becoming a STHL delegate. [allen@regiona.org](mailto:allen@regiona.org) or 828-586-1962 ext. 221.

## Are you passionate about issues facing older adults?

Are you driven by a need to raise your voice on behalf of older adults, in advocacy with like-minded people? Are you eager to use your skills and do the work of learning, deliberating, and advocating in your community and with NC’s legislators?

Contact Lisa Allen with the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging to learn about becoming a Senior Tar Heel Legislature delegate. [allen@regiona.org](mailto:allen@regiona.org) or 828-586-1962 ext. 221.

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# Harness the power of music for happy memories

By Carol Viau

The human brain is complex — unlocking its secrets is an important part of understanding care for people with Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia.

We all know music is powerful — it unlocks memories of happy and important times in our lives. Music also can have a calming effect, which makes it an often-used tool for Alzheimer’s and dementia patients.

Many family members and caregivers can recount stories about how music triggers good memories for people with memory loss.

- My grandmother had Alzheimer’s, and couldn’t recognize family members, but when we put headphones on her ears, with music she loved, she began to sing along.”

- “We took a lady friend with dementia to church. She wasn’t verbal, but when we went to the choir loft, her music memory started to return — she started singing.”

- “My husband can’t remember where he put his keys, but when a song comes on from the 1960s, he remembers the words.”

## The science of music

Why does music stick in one’s



Music appears to tap into long-term memory reserves, providing enjoyment and an ‘unlocking’ of memories for dementia patients.

memory? It’s an intriguing question. Clues may be found in Dartmouth research: “The brain’s auditory cortex, the part that handles information from your ears, holds on to musical memories.”

For those with dementia, music can help maintain cognitive func-

tioning, stimulate brain regions less affected by dementia, and tap into memories and emotions.

“By engaging the brain’s memory pathways, music therapy can help maintain a sense of identity and continuity for dementia patients,” according to the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners.

“One of the last things to go in the brain is music memory. Maybe it’s the rhythm, deeply seated in your brain from the time your mother hummed a lullaby to you,” said Sarajane Melton, director of the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging.

We all know music is linked to emotional memories — hearing a song can take you back to high school days or other significant events in life. It’s the same for dementia patients.

“Music triggers something in the brain neurologically that is remembered,” said Lisa Allen, regional health and community educator for the Area Agency on Aging. “It’s fascinating. When you see it happening in front of you, it’s a really great feeling. We are huge fans of music for ‘brain health.’”

Family nurse practitioner Kellie Kendall at MemoryCare in Asheville recalls seeing two memory care patients, with limited verbal skills, able to play hymns on their piano, well into advanced stages of their disease.

“People with Alzheimer’s revert back to their younger days,” said Anna Franklin, long-term care ombudsman for the Area Agency on Aging. “They may not recognize their current older face in the mirror, but music from long ago some-

## No music device? No problem!

If you’re the caregiver for someone with dementia, you can get them a free digital music player uploaded with your loved one’s favorite music, headphones and a Bluetooth speaker, thanks to the nonprofit Dementia Alliance of North Carolina, a certified “Music & Memory at Home” provider

The “Music & Memory at Home” kit is available for free to “any North Carolinian with a dementia diagnosis, still living in a home setting.” Find the application at: [www.dementianc.org/helpsupport/music-memory-at-home/](http://www.dementianc.org/helpsupport/music-memory-at-home/).

Many county senior centers and libraries also have iPods, earphones and listening devices to loan.





The Skyland Songbirds, composed of residents of Skyland Care Center in Sylva, love sharing the joy of songs in the community.

how triggers their mind.”

She has seen firsthand people with Alzheimer’s in a long-term care facility virtually come “alive,” tapping their fingers when headphones are put on their ears and they hear their favorite type of music.

## Music battles anxiety

Music can have a calming effect, which makes it an often used tool for Alzheimer’s and dementia patients.

“This calming effect is due to music’s ability to regulate emotions by influencing neurochemical systems, including dopamine, which plays a crucial role in mood regulation,” according to the NCCDP

Melton recounted a story about a family caregiver who discovered music helped abate her husband’s

agitation and wandering at night. She got a device to play his favorite music through the night — namely Johnny Cash. The music calmed him down and seemed to relieve some of his anxiety, and eased her anxiety as a caregiver, too.

“People with dementia are often confused and fearful. Music gives them something to enjoy and helps them concentrate on the memories,” Rogers said.

Rogers advocates for the use of

music in long-term care or nursing facilities — either music playing in group rooms or a personal music device with headphones and the genre the patient loves.

Using music to help calm a loved one or help them remember happy times is something caregivers can also do in a home situation.

“Hearing music you like brings comfort and good emotions. There’s something deep inside that brings joy,” Rogers said.

## The story of memory and music

To see the effects of music therapy for Alzheimer’s and dementia patients for yourself, spend an hour watching the award-winning documentary: *Alive Inside, A Story of Music and Memory*. It’s a film about real patients and the use of music as memory therapy.

The documentary chronicles social worker Dan Cohen’s visit to a nursing home, where

he finds impressive examples of music’s capability to “awaken” parts of patients’ brains after listening to music of their youth. The film shows people with severe memory loss, but when they listen to music from the time period of their youth, a pathway into the brain seems to open. It’s a joyful and amazing documentary, as music unlocks a trip down memory lane with verbal response.

The film is available online.



Clients of the Macon County Adult Day program are paid regular visits by a local keyboard player, treating them to a special song during a Valentine’s Day Party last year.



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Pets provide companionship more valuable than many people realize.

# The win-win of pets: *what's not to love?*

## PLUS, PLANNING FOR YOUR PET'S FUTURE

By Carol Viau

If you're a pet owner, you already know the benefits of animal-human bonds — our four legged friends provide companionship, increased physical activity and can even help reduce stress.

Enjoying a pet may be more valuable than people realize.

"It goes without saying that pets are great companions and can ease the loneliness of isolation by providing affection and company," said Windy McKinney, executive director Haywood County's Sarge's Animal Rescue Foundation. "The benefit of companion animals can be more than that, as they are thought to reduce stress, promote healing, and can give their person a sense of purpose as they become responsible pet owners."

Kaleb Lynch, director of Catman2 Shelter in Cullowhee, has witnessed this first hand during his

15 years in animal welfare.

"I've seen the impact companion animals have in their owners' lives and know the power of the human-animal bond," Lynch said. "Seniors with pets report lower rates of depression, and they experience an increase in their overall quality of life and activity rates. A companion pet provides them with emotional and social support that reduces loneliness."

### Real benefits

Pet ownership brings tangible benefits, as well.

Think about walking a dog — that alone helps people get in their daily steps. And, what about cats? Petting a purring cat can heighten relaxation and in doing so, lower heart rate and blood pressure, according to the Human Animal Bond Research Institute. A scientific study found that cat owners were significantly less at-risk of dying from stroke and heart attack.

"Physiologically, human-animal interaction triggers the release of certain hormones such as dopamine and oxytocin," according to the HABRI report.



Pet ownership can help combat social isolation, as a way to get to know people when walking the dog, or as an “icebreaker” to initiate conversations. Showing people cell phone pictures of your pet can be an easy way to bring smiles.

Sarah Jane League of Waynesville shared years of loving pet ownership with her late husband. She keeps busy caring for her two dogs and two cats in her home — plus maintains an outdoor fish pond.

“My dogs and cats offer me companionship and give me an opportunity to take care of them,” League said. “They are sociable and make life very good, keeping close by to me or sitting with me while I watch TV.”

The dogs, League said, provide the extra benefit of acting like a door bell when someone approaches the house. For someone who wants an easy pet, she points out goldfish are “low-maintenance.”

Pet therapy is also a known resource in helping those with dementia — it calms people down and gives them something to nurture. It’s a verified partnership: people benefit from interacting with pets and pets need and love people.

## Think about volunteering

If you feel you’re not up to owning a pet, you can still get the benefits of interaction with furry friends by volunteering at a shelter.

“Dogs and cats are social animals, and companionship is often one of the things that shelter pets

miss the most,” McKinney said. “A person can benefit animals in a shelter by doing something as simple as just talking to them, reading to them, or interacting with them in their cages.”

A volunteer gives much to the animals, each pet benefitting from human touch.

“Many of the animals that come through shelters are scared and skeptical of what is happening to them,” said McKinney. “Volunteers are crucial for helping to show them they are safe and cared for, as well as relieving animals’ stress being in a shelter.”

Volunteering at an animal shelter is a double-win for seniors.

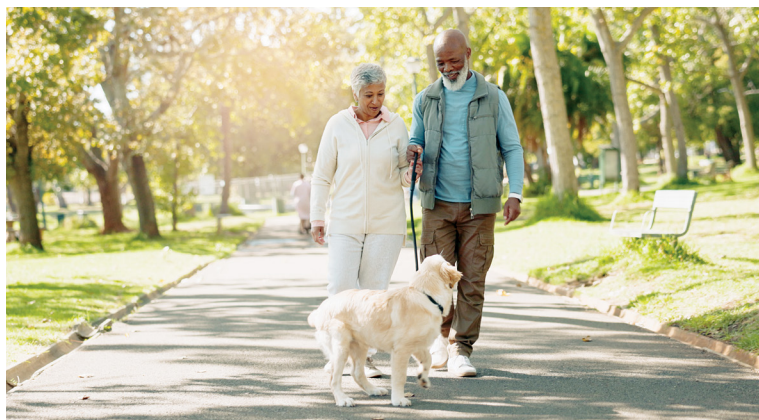
“Volunteering helps keep a person engaged with their community, provides opportunities for making new friends and allows the person to spend time with animals without having to commit to one,” Lynch said. “It’s particularly useful for seniors who may feel they would outlive a pet or can’t have one at home.”

## Make a plan for your pets

When a person can no longer care for their pet, either physically or financially, the animals sometimes wind up in a shelter, through no fault of their own.

“One of the saddest parts of my job is when an older person needs to move into a care facility and can no longer care for their pet,” said

*Continued on page 32*



Dogs and cats need people too. If you feel you’re not up to owning a pet, you can still get benefits of interaction with furry friends by volunteering at a shelter.



The **Clay County Senior Center** is a multi-purpose facility which houses programs for older adults such as Congregate Meals, Home-Delivered Meals, Health & Wellness, Medicare/SHIP Counseling, Operation Fan/Heat Relief, Senior Companion, and Volunteerism.

The Senior Center also provides a wide variety of classes and activities to help our seniors stay active and healthy: Tai Chi, Bridge, Rummikub, Dominos, Needlecraft, Hand & Foot, Corn Hole, Yoga, Basketry, Mah Jongg, 5D Beading, and Bingo. The Senior Center has a pool table, treadmill, exercise bike and WiFi available for participants to use as well as jigsaw puzzles and a reading library.

<https://seniors.claync.us/>



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Lynch. "It's usually a longtime companion and being forced to say goodbye is heartbreaking, for both the person and the animal."

It's wise to plan ahead so your much-loved pets are well cared for. Sarge's advises making a plan for animals ahead of time, for one's own peace of mind, as well as for the benefit of their pets.

"No matter how much the shelter staff and volunteers love them, being in a shelter is a rude awakening for beloved pets," McKinney said.

But, if there is no option with friends or family, pet owners are urged to talk with shelters like Sarge's to see if staff can help find a good and safe place for pets to land.

"Ideally, a family member or friend would take the pet but that's not always possible. That's where

animal shelters and rescues come in," said Lynch. "But it can be difficult to adopt out senior pets. The person is devastated to lose an important friend, and it's a difficult adjustment process for the animal."

Some people choose to plan ahead by designating funds in their will for ongoing care for their pets.

"Accommodating for one's pets in a will is important and something few people think about," Lynch said. "It gives an opportunity to dictate wishes for our most cherished friends. One can choose to allot an amount of money or percentage of their estate to an individual they know or to an animal rescue to take care of their pet. This way, there is no question of what to do with a loved one's pet."



Pets are great companions for seniors and can ease the loneliness of isolation by providing affection and company.

### Animatronic pets are a delightful option

For those unable or no longer able to care for a live pet, there is another option — robotic companion pets.

"You'd think they were real animals until you get close to them," said Kellie Dula with AAA. "They provide the closeness of having a real pet without the physical responsibility."

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging of-

fers companion pets for seniors thanks to a federal grant.

The battery-operated animals, made by Joy for All, include cats, dogs and birds. They move, make sounds and react to touch in very life-like ways.

"If you are a pet lover and you can't have one, this is an excellent alternative," Dula said.

**To inquire about an Animatronic Pet, contact Nadia Blow, at 828-356-5240 or [nadia@regiona.org](mailto:nadia@regiona.org)**



# Aging in place, aging with grace

Losing your independence can be one of the most difficult aspects of aging.

Simple tasks like changing a lightbulb or the sheets become a challenge. Hearing or vision loss can make it difficult to schedule appointments over the phone or read your mail. Even basic household affairs can become overwhelming, from keeping up with daily medicines to managing your bills.

Sometimes, the barriers to remaining in your own home are too great to overcome. But in many cases, altering your routine and modifying your environment can allow you to age in place more comfortably.

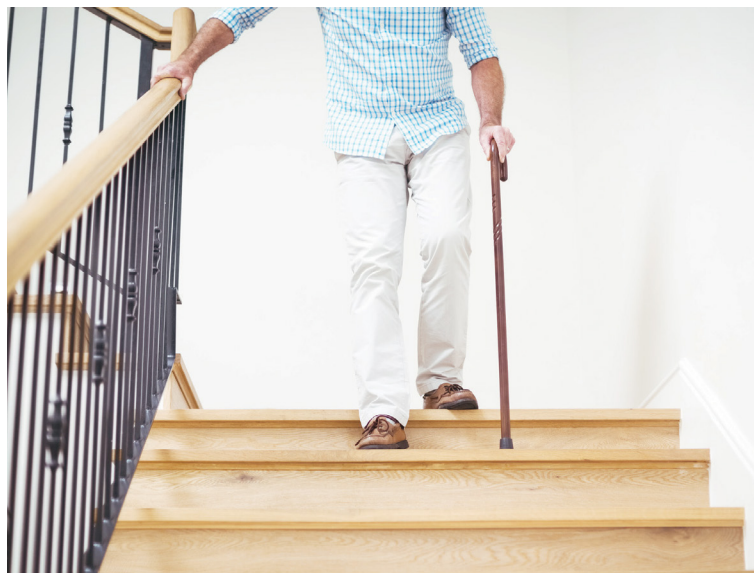
It's important to assess your home for barriers to living independently well before the need arises and develop aging-in-place

strategies and solutions. View your home and daily routine as if you suddenly lost mobility from a stroke. Do you need a walk-in shower instead of stepping over the side of a tub? Do you need to declutter hallways to comfortably move with a walker? Can you reach the most important things in the kitchen easily?

Be on the look-out for tripping hazards, like bath mats without a rubber backing or lips where there's a transition between flooring types.

Every county has a designated Options Counselor that will discuss your unique circumstances and help you navigate options to remain at home if possible.

Options Counselors can also direct older adults toward resources they might not realize exist, like a medical equipment loaner closet



with everything from elevated toilet seats to walkers.

For family members embarking on the journey of caring for a loved one at home for the first time, Options Counselors can

help them adapt to their new role.

*See the directory at the end of this magazine for the Options Counselor in your county.*

*Continued on page 34*

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# Choosing a long-term care facility

In some cases, there's ample time to look down the road and choose the type of long-term care facility that's right for your situation. In other cases, a decision has to be made quickly, like in the event

of a stroke or the unexpected death of a spouse who was serving as the primary caregiver for their partner.

If possible, plan ahead and choose a long-term care facility before you actually need one by researching the options and taking a tour.

Long-term care provides many benefits and comes in many forms

- **Skilled Nursing:** Provides the highest level of medical care, with the most comprehensive range of services and supervision. Skilled nursing facilities also offer short-term care and rehab for seniors

recovering from surgery, illness or hospitalization.

- **Assisted Living:** A middle ground for seniors who need extra support but maintain some level of independence. Seniors have access to assistance when needed, such as light personal care like bathing and medication maintenance.

- **Family Care Homes:** A shared residential setting for a small group of older adults with full-time caretakers.



# Avoid caregiver burn out with these respite resources

Unless you've experienced the role of a full-time caregiver, it's impossible to comprehend the amount of stress and exhaustion

that comes with it. All too often, caregivers are inundated with the tasks that come with caring for a loved one that they forget to care for themselves. And over time, neglecting your own needs leads to caregiver burnout — which is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion.

There are resources that can help.

- **The Family Caregiver Support:** This program provides caregivers with needed support to reduce depression, anxiety, and stress. In addition to counseling, referrals and an information source, the program also provides vouchers for caregivers to bring in respite care to take a break. Contact Nadia Blow, Family Caregiver and Dementia Support Coordinator with AAA, at 828-356-5240 or [nadia@regiona.org](mailto:nadia@regiona.org).

- **Care in the home:** Check with your local senior center or social services department for a list of in-home aid providers that offer

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different levels of services.

• **Care outside the home:**

Adult Day Care programs provide respite for caregivers who need a safe, supervised setting for their loved one — whether it's five days a week, or just a day or two. There are three adult day programs in the seven western counties. Maple Leaf Adult Respite in Haywood County, Adult Day Program in Jackson County and Care Connection Adult Day Program in Macon County.

• **Connect with other caregivers:** Check the resource directory at the end of the magazine for a support group in your county.

• **Project C.A.R.E.:** Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty is a dementia-specific support program for individuals who directly care for loved ones with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. 828-356-5240.

• **Lifespan Respite:** Reimburses eligible family caregivers caring for individuals of any age

## LONG-TERM CARE VIDEO SERIES

Deciding whether to enter a long-term care facility can be a difficult crossroads. A new video series produced by the Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging is designed to help seniors and their caregivers start the conversation and guide them through the planning process and decision points. The informational video is available online at [regiona.org/aaa-2](http://regiona.org/aaa-2).

To find out how to borrow a DVD version, call Anna Franklin, Long Term Care Ombudsman for the AAA, at 828-339-2223 or email [anna@regiona.org](mailto:anna@regiona.org).

for up to \$500 in respite care services in a calendar year. Applicants must be referred to the program by a local professional organization. 828-356-5240.

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828-837-4712

### Cherokee County Health Department

228 Hilton St., Murphy  
828-837-7486

### Andrews Health Center, Cherokee County

15 High School Dr., Andrews  
828-835-4536

## HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

### Four Seasons Hospice and Palliative Care

3 Wilson Street, Andrews  
866.466.9734 | [www.fourseasonscf.org](http://www.fourseasonscf.org)

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

### Community Alternatives Program:

Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital  
3990 East US Hwy 64 Alt, Murphy  
828-837-8652

### Cherokee County Department of Social Services

4800 W US Highway 64, Murphy  
828-837-7455

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

### Cherokee County Senior Services

69 Alpine St., Murphy

828-837-2467

[www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services](http://www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services)

### Southwestern Commission Area

Agency on Aging  
125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva

828-586-1962 | [regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTERS AND SENIOR MEAL SITES

### Penland Senior Center

69 Alpine St., Murphy • 828-837-2467  
[www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services](http://www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services)

### Hiwassee Dam

7829 Highway 294, Murphy  
828-644-0300

### Andrews Sunshine Center

54 Park St., Andrews  
828-321-4505

### Unaka

14945 Joe Brown Hwy., Murphy | 828-835-8313

### John Welch Senior Center, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

302 Airport Road, Marble  
828-835-9741

## HOME DELIVERED MEALS

828-837-2467

[www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services](http://www.cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/262/Senior-Services)

## TRANSIT

### Cherokee County Transit

77 Hardin St., Murphy  
828-837-1789  
[cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/233/transit](http://cherokeeconomy-nc.gov/233/transit)

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP)

Cherokee County Senior Services

69 Alpine St., Murphy  
828-837-2467

## MEDICAID

### Department of Social Services

4800 W.U.S. Highway 64, Murphy  
828-837-7455

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Four Square Community Action

61 Milton Mashburn Dr., Andrews  
828-321-4475  
[www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com](http://www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com)

## Public Libraries

• Andrews: 871 Main St.

828-0321-5956

• Murphy: 9 Blumenthal St

828-837-2417

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Dementia Support Group

Murphy Rehab & Nursing  
828-835-7588

## EBCI

### Cherokee Tribal Resources

A health resource directory for enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is available at [cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide](http://cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide)

## PHYSICIANS AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

### Smoky Mountain Foot & Ankle Clinic

35 NC Hwy 141, Murphy  
828-835-8389  
[smokymountainfootclinic.com](http://smokymountainfootclinic.com)



# GRAHAM

## HEALTHCARE

**Graham County Urgent Care  
& Family Practice**  
21 South Main St., Robbinsville  
828-479-7777

**Graham County Public Health  
Department**  
191 P and J Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-7900  
[www.health.grahamcounty.org](http://www.health.grahamcounty.org)

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

**Community Alternatives Program:  
Graham County Health Department**  
828-479-7900

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

**Graham County Senior Center**  
185 West Fort Hill Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-7977  
[grahamcounty.org/senior-center](http://grahamcounty.org/senior-center)

**Southwestern Commission Area  
Agency on Aging**

125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva  
828-586-1962 | [regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTERS AND SENIOR MEAL SITES

**Graham County Senior Center**  
185 West Fort Hill Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-7977  
[grahamcounty.org/senior-center](http://grahamcounty.org/senior-center)

**Snowbird Senior Center, Eastern Band  
of Cherokee Indians**  
157 Jackson Branch Rd., Robbinsville  
828-346-6746

## HOME DELIVERED MEALS

**Graham County Senior Center**  
828-479-7977  
[grahamcounty.org/senior-center](http://grahamcounty.org/senior-center)

## TRANSIT

**Graham County Transit**  
201 West Fort Hill Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-4129  
[Grahamcountytransit.org](http://Grahamcountytransit.org)

## MEDICARE

**Seniors Health Insurance Information**

## Program (SHIIP)

Graham County Senior Center  
185 West Fort Hill Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-7977  
[grahamcounty.org/senior-center](http://grahamcounty.org/senior-center)

## MEDICAID

**Graham County Social Services**  
191 P And J Rd., Robbinsville  
828-479-7911  
[grahamcounty.org/social-services](http://grahamcounty.org/social-services)

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

**Four Square Community Action**  
828-321-4475  
[www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com](http://www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com)

## PUBLIC LIBRARY

**Graham County Public Library**  
80 Knight St. Robbinsville  
828-479-8796

## EBCI

**Cherokee Tribal Resources**  
A health resource directory for enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is available at [cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide](http://cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide)

# CLAY

## HEALTHCARE

**Clay County Public Health Department**  
345 Courthouse Dr., Hayesville  
828-389-8052  
[www.clayhdnc.us](http://www.clayhdnc.us)

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

**Community Alternatives Program:**  
Clay County Department of Social Services  
119 Courthouse Dr., Hayesville  
828-389-6301

**Clay County Community Paramedic**  
828-389-8052

**Mountain Home Health**  
828-389-8106

**Western Carolina Home Health**  
828-389-4699

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

**Southwestern Commission Area  
Agency on Aging**  
125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva  
828-586-1962  
[regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTER

**Clay County Senior Center**  
196 Ritter Rd., Hayesville  
828-389-9271  
[www.seniors.claync.us](http://www.seniors.claync.us)

## SENIOR MEALS

**Clay County Senior Center**  
196 Ritter Rd., Hayesville  
828-389-9271  
[www.seniors.claync.us](http://www.seniors.claync.us)

**Home Delivered Meals**  
828-389-9271  
[www.seniors.claync.us](http://www.seniors.claync.us)



# CLAY

## TRANSIT

### Clay County Transportation

391 Courthouse Dr., Hayesville

828-389-0644

[www.transportation.claync.us](http://www.transportation.claync.us)

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information

#### Program (SHIIP)

Clay County Senior Center

196 Ritter Rd., Hayesville

828-389-9271

[www.seniors.claync.us](http://www.seniors.claync.us)

## MEDICAID

### Clay County Department of Social

#### Services

119 Courthouse Dr., Hayesville

828-389-6301

[www.dss.claync.us](http://www.dss.claync.us)

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Four Square Community Action

828-321-4475

[www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com](http://www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com)

### Hinton Rural Life Center

2330 Hinton Center Rd, Hayesville, NC 28904

828-389-8336

## PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Moss Memorial Library

26 Anderson St., Hayesville

828-389-8401

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Caregiver Support Group

Clay County Care Center

828-230-3664

# HAYWOOD

## HEALTHCARE

### Haywood Regional Medical Center, Duke LifePoint

262 Leroy George Dr., Clyde

828-456-7311 | [www.myhaywoodregional.com](http://www.myhaywoodregional.com)

### Urgent Care West, Duke LifePoint

556 Hazelwood Ave., Waynesville

828-452-8890 | [www.myhaywoodregional.com](http://www.myhaywoodregional.com)

### Urgent Care Canton, Duke LifePoint

55 Buckeye Cove Rd., Canton

828-648-0282

### Mercy Urgent Care

120 Frazier St, Waynesville

828-210-2121 | [mercyurgentcare.org](http://mercyurgentcare.org)

### Blue Ridge Community Health

490 Hospital Dr., Clyde

828-246-6372

### Haywood Health and Human Services

157 Paragon Parkway, Clyde

828-452-6675 | [www.haywoodcountync.gov](http://www.haywoodcountync.gov)

## HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

### Haywood Hospice & Palliative Care

43 Bowman Dr., Waynesville

828-452-5039

[lhgroup.com/locations/haywood-hospice-and-palliative-care/](http://lhgroup.com/locations/haywood-hospice-and-palliative-care/)

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

### Community Alternatives Program

Haywood Health and Human Services

Department

828-356-2810

### Mountain Projects In-Home Aid

2177 Asheville Rd., Waynesville

828-356-2800 | [mountainprojects.org](http://mountainprojects.org)

## SKILLED NURSING AND ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES

### Silver Bluff Village

100 Silver Bluff Dr., Canton

828-648-2044 | [www.silverbluffvillage.com](http://www.silverbluffvillage.com)

### Silver Bluff Rehab

100 Silver Bluff Dr., Canton

828-549-1550 | [www.silverbluffvillage.com](http://www.silverbluffvillage.com)

### Maggie Valley Nursing and Rehabilitation

75 Fisher Loop, Maggie Valley

828-926-4326

[www.maggievalleyrehab.com](http://www.maggievalleyrehab.com)

### Haywood Lodge & Retirement Center

251 Shelton St., Waynesville

828-456-8365 | [Haywoodlodge.com](http://Haywoodlodge.com)

### Skyland Terrace & Rehabilitation

516 Wall St., Waynesville

828-452-3154

### Spicewood Cottages

Dementia & Alzheimer's Care

39 Loving Way, Clyde | 828-452-0238

[haywoodlodge.com/spicewood-cottages-special-care-alzheimers-and-dementia-residents](http://haywoodlodge.com/spicewood-cottages-special-care-alzheimers-and-dementia-residents)

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

### Senior Resource Center

81 Elmwood Way, Waynesville

828-452-2370 | [www.haywoodseniors.org](http://www.haywoodseniors.org)

### Mountain Projects

2177 Asheville Rd., Waynesville

828-452-1447 | [Mountainprojects.org](http://Mountainprojects.org)

### Southwestern Commission Area

#### Agency on Aging

125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva

828-586-1962 | [regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTERS

### Senior Resource Center

81 Elmwood Way, Waynesville

828-356-2800 | [www.haywoodseniors.org](http://www.haywoodseniors.org)

## SENIOR MEALS

### Waynesville Armory\*

44 Boundary St., Waynesville

828-452-2370

### Maggie Valley Community Building\*

3987 Soco Rd., Maggie Valley

828-452-2370

\*Managed by Mountain Projects

### Home Delivered Meals

Haywood Health & Human Services

828-356-2442



## TRANSIT

### Haywood Transit

50 Armory Dr., Clyde

828-565-0362 | [www.haywoodtransit.com](http://www.haywoodtransit.com)

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP)

Mountain Projects/Haywood Senior Resource Center

81 Elmwood Way, Waynesville

828-356-2800

[haywoodseniors.org/shiip](http://haywoodseniors.org/shiip)

### Medicare Insurance Plan Helpline

Haywood Regional Medical Center

855-582-5181

[www.myhaywoodregional.com](http://www.myhaywoodregional.com)

## MEDICAID

### Haywood County Health and Human Services

157 Paragon Parkway, Clyde

828-452-6620

[www.haywoodcountync.gov](http://www.haywoodcountync.gov)

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Mountain Projects

2177 Asheville Rd., Waynesville

828-452-1447

[mountainprojects.org/index.php/housing-rehabilitation](http://mountainprojects.org/index.php/housing-rehabilitation)

## ADULT DAY PROGRAM

### Maple Leaf Adult Respite

63 Elmwood Way, Waynesville

828-356-2236

[www.haywoodcountync.gov](http://www.haywoodcountync.gov)

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES

• **Waynesville:** 678 S Haywood St.

828-452-5169

• **Canton:** 11 Pennsylvania Ave.

828-648-2924

• **Maggie Valley:** 3987 Soco Rd.

828-356-2541

• **Fines Creek:** 190 Fines Creek Rd.

828-356-2551

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Dementia Support Group

Senior Resource Center

828-356-2800

### Grief Gatherings

3:30 p.m. on second Wednesday of the month

Coffee Cup Café, 48 Haywood Park, Clyde

828-452-5039

### Haywood Dementia Response Effort

81 Elmwood Way, Waynesville

828-356-2817 | [haydre.org](http://haydre.org)

### Parkinson's Support Group

Senior Resource Center

828-356-2800

### Bereavement Support Group

828-452-5039

### Women's Cancer Support Group

703-609-9107

### Widows and Widowers Support Group

828-476-0808

### Survivors of Suicide Loss

910-528-0169

## EBCI

### Cherokee Tribal Resources

A health resource directory for enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is available at [cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide](http://cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide)

## INSURANCE

### Apply 4 Medical 2 Day

P. O. Box 33, Waynesville

828-356-5540 | [Apply4medical2day.com](http://Apply4medical2day.com)

## LEGAL, FINANCIAL AND ESTATE PLANNING

### H&R Block Tax Preparation

65 Eagles Nest Rd., Waynesville

828-452-2495

[www.hrblock.com/local-tax-offices/north-carolina/waynesville/65-eagles-nest-rd/32224](http://www.hrblock.com/local-tax-offices/north-carolina/waynesville/65-eagles-nest-rd/32224)

## MEDICAL SUPPLIES

### Carolina Breathing Solutions

755 S. Haywood St., Waynesville

828-452-1919 | [Carolinabreathingsolutions.com](http://Carolinabreathingsolutions.com)

### Mountaineer Oxygen Services

42 Branner Ave., Waynesville • 828-452-3095

[www.mountaineeroxygenservices.com](http://www.mountaineeroxygenservices.com)

## NONPROFITS

### Haywood Healthcare Foundation

262 Leroy George Dr., Clyde

828-452-8343 | [Haywoodhealthcarefoundation.org](http://Haywoodhealthcarefoundation.org)

## PHYSICIANS AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

### Movement for Life Physical Therapy

13 Haywood Office Park, Waynesville

828-452-1306

[www.movementforlife.com/physical-therapy-clinics/north-carolina/north-carolina/waynesville](http://www.movementforlife.com/physical-therapy-clinics/north-carolina/north-carolina/waynesville)

### Smoky Mountain Foot & Ankle Clinic

289 Access Rd., Waynesville

828-452-4343 | [smokymountainfootclinic.com](http://smokymountainfootclinic.com)

### Gant Hearing Care

69 Westridge Market Pl, Candler, NC 28715

828-463-5175 | [ganthearingcare.com](http://ganthearingcare.com)



## HEALTHCARE

### Harris Regional Hospital,

#### Duke LifePoint

68 Hospital Rd., Sylva

828-586-7000

### Harris Regional Hospital Urgent Care

176 Walmart Plaza, Sylva

828-631-9462

### Mountain View Physicians Urgent Care

98 Cope Creek Rd., Sylva

828-586-7925

### Jackson County Health Department

538 Scotts Creek Rd., Sylva

828-586-8994

### Blue Ridge Community Health

293 Hospital Rd., Sylva

828-477-4334

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

### Community Alternatives Program:

#### Health Keeperz

52 Colonial Square, Sylva

828-471-5230 | [healthkeeperz.com](http://healthkeeperz.com)

### DisAbility Partners

525 Mineral Springs Rd., Sylva

828-631-1167 | [Disabilitypartners.org](http://Disabilitypartners.org)

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

### Jackson County Department on Aging

100 County Services Park, Sylva

828-631-8039 | [www.aging.jacksonnc.org](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org)

### Southwestern Commission Area

#### Agency on Aging

125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva

828-356-2800 | [regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

### Mountain Projects

25 Schulman St., Sylva

828-586-2345 | [mountainprojects.org](http://mountainprojects.org)

## SENIOR CENTERS AND MEAL SITES

### Jackson County Senior Center

100 County Services Park, Sylva

828-356-2800

[www.aging.jacksonnc.org/jackson-county-senior-center](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org/jackson-county-senior-center)

### Cashiers Senior Center

217 Frank Allen Rd., Cashiers

828-745-6856 | [www.aging.jacksonnc.org](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org)

## HOME DELIVERED MEALS

### Jackson County Department on Aging

828-586-5494 | [www.aging.jacksonnc.org](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org)

## TRANSIT

### Jackson County Transit

1148 Haywood Rd., Sylva

828-586-0233 | [www.jacksoncountyttransit.com](http://www.jacksoncountyttransit.com)

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information

#### Program (SHIIP)

Jackson County Department on Aging

100 County Services Park, Sylva

828-631-8037 | [www.aging.jacksonnc.org](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org)

## MEDICAID

### Jackson County Department

#### of Social Services

15 Griffin St., Sylva

828-586-5546

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Mountain Projects

25 Schulman St., Sylva

828-586-2345

[mountainprojects.org/index.php/housing-rehabilitation](http://mountainprojects.org/index.php/housing-rehabilitation)

### Project C.A.R.E.

#### Community Action to Reach Elderly

100 County Services Park, Sylva

828-631-8040

[www.aging.jacksonnc.org/project-care-fire](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org/project-care-fire)

## ADULT DAY PROGRAM

### Jackson County Adult Day Program

100 County Services Park, Sylva

828-586-5441 | [www.aging.jacksonnc.org](http://www.aging.jacksonnc.org)

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### Jackson County Main Library

310 Keener Street, Sylva,

828-586-2016

### Albert-Carlton Library

249 Frank Allen Road, Cashiers,

828-734-0215

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Dementia Support Group

828-227-7165

### Bereavement Support Group

828-450-7575

### Breast Cancer Support Group

828-631-8100

### Tremor Support Group

828.736.3165

## EBCI

### Cherokee Tribal Resources

A health resource directory for enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is available at [cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide](http://cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide)

## PHYSICIANS AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

### Jackson Medical Associates

1188 Skyland Dr, Sylva

828-339-2273 | [Jacksonmedicalassociates.com](http://Jacksonmedicalassociates.com)

### Smoky Mountain Foot & Ankle Clinic

32 Asheville Highway, Sylva

828-586-8950 | [smokymountainfootclinic.com](http://smokymountainfootclinic.com)



## HEALTHCARE

### Angel Medical Center, Mission Health

124 One Center Court, Franklin

828-524-8411

[missionhealth.org/member-hospitals/angel](https://missionhealth.org/member-hospitals/angel)

### Highlands-Cashiers Hospital,

### Mission Health

190 Hospital Dr., Highlands

828-526-1200

[missionhealth.org/member-hospitals/highlands-cashiers](https://missionhealth.org/member-hospitals/highlands-cashiers)

### Mission My Care Now, urgent care

190 Riverview St., Franklin

828-369-4427

[missionhealth.org/mission-my-care-now](https://missionhealth.org/mission-my-care-now)

### Smoky Mountain Urgent Care

195 Franklin Plaza, Franklin

828-634-7745

### Franklin Community Based

### VA Outpatient Clinic

647 Wayah St., Franklin | 828-369-1781

### Community Care Clinic of Franklin

1830 Lakeside Dr., Franklin

828-349-2085

### Community Care Clinic of

### Highlands-Cashiers

52 Aunt Dora Dr., Highlands

828-526-1991

### Macon County Public Health

1830 Lakeside Dr., Franklin

828-349-2081

[www.maconnc.org/health-department.html](https://www.maconnc.org/health-department.html)

## HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

### Four Seasons

171 Hospital Dr., Suite 600, Highlands

828-526-2552

### SECU Hospice House, Four Seasons

272 Maple St., Franklin

828-524-6375

## HOME HEALTH AND IN- HOME SERVICES

### Community Alternatives Program:

### CarePartners Home Health,

### Angel/Mission

170 Church St., Franklin

828-369-4206

[missionhealth.org/services-treatments/home-health](https://missionhealth.org/services-treatments/home-health)

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

### Macon County Senior Services

108 Wayah St., Franklin

828-349-0211

[www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html)

### Southwestern Commission Area

### Agency on Aging

125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva

828-586-1962 | [regiona.org/aaa](https://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTER

### Crawford Senior Center

108 Wayah St., Franklin

828-349-2058

[www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html)

## SENIOR MEALS

### Community Resource Center

108 Wayah St., Franklin

828-349-0211

[www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html)

### Home Delivered Meals

828-349-0211

[www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html)

## TRANSIT

### Macon County Transit

36 Pannell Lane, Franklin

828-349-2222 | [www.macontransit.com](https://www.macontransit.com)

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information

### Program (SHIIP)

Macon County Senior Services

108 Wayah St., Franklin

828-349-2059 | [www.ncshiip.com](https://www.ncshiip.com)

## MEDICAID

### Macon County Department of Social Services

1832 Lakeside Dr., Franklin

828-349-2124

[www.maconnc.org/dss-family.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-family.html)

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Macon Program for Progress

82 East Orchard View Lane, Franklin

828-524-4471

### Macon County Housing Department

23 Macon Ave., Franklin

828-369-2605

## ADULT DAY PROGRAM

### Care Connection Adult Day Program

108 Wayah St., Franklin

828-349-2236

[www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html](https://www.maconnc.org/dss-senior-services.html)

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### Macon County Main Library

149 Siler Farm Road, Franklin,

828-524-3600

### Hudson Library

554 Main Street, Highlands,

828-526-3031

### Nantahala Community Library

36 White Oak Lane, Topton,

828-321-3020

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Bereavement Support Group

• Care Partners 828-369-4206

• Four Seasons 828-692-6178

### Dementia Support Group

First Presbyterian Church,

828-524-3119

### Stroke Support Group

828-349-6679

### Visually Impaired Persons Support Group

Mary Judernatz, 828-371-8701

### Dementia Caregiver's Support Group

Crawford Senior Center, 828-349-2058

## PHYSICIANS AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

### Smoky Mountain Foot & Ankle Clinic

188 Georgia Road, Franklin

828-349-4534

[smokymountainfootclinic.com](https://smokymountainfootclinic.com)

## HEALTHCARE

### Swain Community, Duke LifePoint

45 Plateau St., Bryson City  
828-488-2155

### Smoky Mountain Urgent Care

80 Veterans Blvd., Bryson City  
828-538-4546

### Swain County Health Department

545 Center St., Bryson City  
828-488-3198  
[www.swaincountync.gov/health-home](http://www.swaincountync.gov/health-home)

## HOME HEALTH AND IN-HOME SERVICES

### Community Alternatives Program: Health Keeperz

52 Colonial Square, Sylva  
828-471-5230 | [healthkeeperz.com](http://healthkeeperz.com)

### Health Department

545 Center St., Bryson City  
878-488-3198

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

### Swain County Senior Center

125 Brendle St., Bryson City  
828-488-3047

## Southwestern Commission Area Agency

### on Aging

125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva  
828-586-1962 | [regiona.org/aaa](http://regiona.org/aaa)

## SENIOR CENTERS

### Swain County Senior Center

125 Brendle St., Bryson City  
828-488-3047

### Tsali Manor, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

133 Tsali Manor St., Cherokee  
828-359-6860

## SENIOR MEALS

### Swain County Senior Center

125 Brendle St., Bryson City  
828-488-3047

### Tsali Manor, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

133 Tsali Manor St., Cherokee  
828-359-6860

## TRANSIT

### Swain Public Transit

125 Brendle St., Bryson City  
828-488-3213

## MEDICARE

### Seniors Health Insurance Information

## Program (SHIIP)

Swain County Cooperative Extension  
60 Almond School Rd., Bryson City  
828-488-3848 | [www.ncshiip.com](http://www.ncshiip.com)

## MEDICAID

### Department of Social Services

80 Academy St., Bryson City  
828-488-6921  
[swaincountync.gov/dss/dss-adult-services.html](http://swaincountync.gov/dss/dss-adult-services.html)

## HOME MODIFICATIONS

### Four Square Community Action

828-321-4475  
[www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com](http://www.foursquarecommunityactioninc.com)

## PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Marianna Black Library

33 Fryemont Street, Bryson City  
828-488-3030

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Dementia Support Group

828-359-6294

## EBCI

### Cherokee Tribal Resources

A health resource directory for enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is available at [cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide](http://cherokee-phhs.com/resource-guide)

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