

Gubernatorial Candidate Forum – August 3, 2022
10:00 AM to 11:30 AM
East Providence High School Auditorium
FORUM QUESTIONS with YOUTUBE LINKS to ANSWERS

1. Solving the Health Care Workforce Crisis – Kelly Arnold, Board Vice Chair, Rhode Island Health Care Association

Workforce challenges are across the board for all providers of services to RI's aging and disabled population. Sufficient and sustainable wages that attract and retain health and home care workers will require greater investments by the state. In order for providers of care to meet their current and future staffing needs, there must be a concerted workforce development effort to rebuild the health care workforce to be even better than before the pandemic. This effort should include setting a minimum wage of \$20/hour for direct care staff working in Medicaid contracted facilities and agencies. As governor, what other action will you take to help rebuild and sustain a viable workforce for nursing home and homecare providers?

Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location **14:25**

2. Long Term Care Medicaid Rebalancing – Jim Nyberg, Executive Director, Leading Age RI

Greater investments in both home and community based and nursing home care are needed to address the service demands of RI's increasing 75 and older and disabled population. A third to half will need a combination of long-term support services. Most seniors strongly prefer to receive care at home or in a community setting rather than in a nursing home. Lower than the national average, only 30 percent of RI's spending on long term services and supports for seniors and people with disabilities (exclusive of people with intellect and developmental disabilities) is spent on home and community based. As governor, what is your plan for Medicaid rebalancing and expansion to improve home and community-based care opportunities while ensuring the financial viability of the nursing homes?

Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location **27:33**

3. Strengthening OHA and Supports for Aging in Community – Bob Robillard, President of Rhode Island Senior Center Directors Association

The Department of Elderly Affairs had 65 staff in the mid-1990s. Currently the Office of Healthy Aging has 31 staff. The population of RI's seniors has increased dramatically and continues to grow. Funding for Senior Centers, senior nutrition programs, transportation, information about services and other community supports has not kept pace with the growth in population, falling further behind in addressing needs. As governor, what will you do to increase resources to significantly support healthy aging in the community?

Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Time location: **40:55**

4. Addressing Economic Security and Healthcare Costs for Lower-Income Seniors - Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies, Executive Director of the Economic Progress Institute

There are two immediate ways for the state to impact the incomes of lower-income seniors – the SSI and the MSP programs. Supplemental Security Program (SSI) is a federal program that provides monthly payments, with added state dollars, to seniors (age 65+) and people with disabilities who have limited income and resources. The total benefit (\$880.92) in 2022 is only 78 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). While the federal portion is adjusted annually, the state share has not been increased in many years. For lower-income Medicare enrollees, average out-of-pocket healthcare costs at \$6,668, are a significant economic burden for those who are not eligible for Medicaid. The Medicare Savings Programs (MSP), a joint federal/state program pays some Medicare-related costs. States are allowed to increase the eligibility limits. Rhode Island uses the federal minimum for both income and assets while neighboring states have expanded financial eligibility for MSP. As governor, will you: a) include a yearly cost-of-living adjustment to the state SSI Supplemental payment in your 2024 proposed budget; and, b) increase eligibility for the Medicare Savings Programs for seniors and people with disabilities in your proposed 2024 budget by eliminating the asset test and increasing eligibility to at least 185% FPL?

Question and Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location **52:50**

5. Affordable Senior Housing – Joan Kwiatkowski, CEO PACE Organization of Rhode Island

The need for safe and affordable housing for older Rhode Islanders has been well-documented and is critical to maintaining their health, well-being, and independence. Now that the state has passed an unprecedented \$250 million in funding for housing, as governor, how will you ensure that an adequate amount is allocated to support our older population?

Question and Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location **55:27**

6. Eliminating Senior Health Inequity – Jim Vincent, President of NAACP Providence

COVID disproportionately impacted black and brown communities - with particular devastation on our black and brown elders and black and brown healthcare workers and persons with disability. The 2020 Healthy Aging Data Report tells us that there are more than 50 health indicators that have evident disparities in the Black and Brown Senior population, including diabetes, congestive heart failure, stroke and Alzheimer's disease. There is a lack of access to high quality healthcare and lack of information about available resources that support aging independently for our older black and brown Rhode Islanders. The lack of data from our state agencies on who they serve and where those services are being provided inhibits the state's ability to make improvements in access and delivery of care. As governor, will you commit to doing better for the black and brown communities by ensuring every state agency collects and analyzes data on race, ethnicity and languages spoken for the people they serve within your first 2 years in office, make this data available to the public, and make improvements as needed in the second half of your term to ensure equal access to high quality healthcare and information about available resources?

Question and Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location **1:06:50**

7. Creating a Rhode Island Cross-Departmental Integrated Strategic Plan on Aging – *Maureen Maigret, Chair of Aging in the Community Subcommittee of the Long-Term Coordinating Council*

State aging and long-term services are fragmented, spread across a number of state agencies, lack stable leadership and a coherent and overarching vision. Development of a cross-sectional Strategic Plan on Aging will help the state look at its infrastructure and coordination of services for its rapidly growing older population. Such a plan will look at the domains for community livability such as transportation, housing, information services, food and economic security, access to healthcare, supports for living at home and caregiver supports and public spaces. It will identify service gaps and waiting lists and racial inequities in the accessibility and delivery of services for immigrants and communities of color. It will use data to project long term services and support needs. And it will bring together state agencies, members of the legislature, community organizations, direct-care staff, older persons and persons with disability, faith and business leaders and academia together to set a vision, goals and action steps. As governor, will you pledge to address the needs of our growing older population and provide the leadership and resources necessary to create and implement a Rhode Island Strategic Plan on Aging?

Question and Answers: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location: **1:21:01**

Summaries of Candidates: <https://youtu.be/okQ5FguKMao> Scroll to time location: **1:32:50**