



Altenheim Resource Services

Timely Resources DEEPER DIVE



OLDER AMERICAN'S MONTH with Volunteer Editor: Jeanette Wojcik
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It's time to celebrate! It's Older Americans Month and for [17.7% of the U.S. population](#) it is time to recognize older Americans' contributions, highlight aging trends and reaffirm commitments to serving the older adults in our communities. This year's theme **Flip the Script on Aging** encourages us [to challenge the stereotypes](#) of aging and to embrace a more realistic view of what it means to grow older.

Near the end of the Baby Boom era (1963), President John F. Kennedy established the annual observance of Older Americans Month. At the time, approximately a third of older adults lived in poverty and there were few resources to help them. Two years later, the Older Americans Act was signed into law. The [act and its subsequent amendments](#) have given us the Area Agencies on Aging, the Senior Community Service Employment Program, the National Institute on Aging, Adult Protective Services, the Nursing Home Reform Law and the National Family Caregiver Support Program. This is only a few of the programs and services that have enhanced life for millions of older Americans.

Older Americans have much to offer our communities. Their dedication and hard work have provided stability, guidance and support for generations of younger Americans. They have shared their wisdom and experience with those who follow them. [James Ozvath](#) wrote in an article for *Aging Assistant* that senior citizens "often serve as caregivers or volunteers at local organizations such as schools or churches . . . many senior citizens use their skill sets from previous careers in order to help others by volunteering with non-profits or teaching classes . . . [they] also make up a large portion of voters who can influence policy decisions that affect everyone's lives, from healthcare reform to environmental protection initiatives." It is certainly time to celebrate!

While we celebrate this month we must wonder where we go from here. Those Baby Boomers continue to age and are living longer than generations before them. Are we ready to care for this growing aging population? In an article for the [American Society on Aging](#), Robert Applebaum and Athena Koumoutzi, professors of Gerontology at Miami University wrote that "The establishment of the aging network has allowed communities across the nation to develop an infrastructure of information, services, and coordination to many elders in need." However, they question the future of this network because of declining government funding. They point out that despite the decline in funding, social care services do reduce the need for services at a higher level.

Family and friends will continue to be the primary caregivers for older Americans. As we celebrate this year, we need to be thinking about the resources older Americans will need to remain independent for as long as possible and the services that will help them age in place. We need to challenge those stereotypes about aging and embrace the opportunities. Those opportunities include finding creative, innovative ways to care for older Americans and to find ways to continue those services and support for future generations of older Americans.