

# Drivers for **Aging Well** in America

As lawmakers develop policy proposals to respond to an aging America, they must address five key dynamics that impact the ability of older adults to age well.

**Connection to and engagement in the community is key to ensuring that older adults can age at home and in their communities with vitality and longevity.** Functional changes associated with aging can increase social isolation and loneliness among older adults. For older adults, risk factors associated with social isolation, such as an increased likelihood of dementia and living alone, are tremendously detrimental to health outcomes and increase health care costs. Services and infrastructure—such as accessible and available transportation options as well as employment and volunteer engagement opportunities—are essential to curbing rapidly increasing rates of isolation and loneliness in our aging society.

**Promoting aging at home and in the community requires accessible and affordable housing and long-term care options.** More than 80 percent<sup>2</sup> of people want to age at home and in their communities. However, nearly 70 percent of individuals older than age 65 will ultimately need some long-term care.<sup>3</sup> Affordable, accessible housing located in age-friendly communities with available care supports is in particularly short supply. Ensuring that a growing population of older adults can age well at home requires policy leaders to rethink housing and long-term services and supports options.

**A robust and well-trained caregiving workforce is essential in order for older adults to continue living at home and in the community.** Older adults are expected to outnumber children under 18 for the first time in U.S. history by 2034.<sup>4</sup> Coupled

with this demographic shift, the nation's declining birth rate means that a shortage of family caregivers is poised to be a serious impediment to ensuring that our nation will be able to meet the care needs of our aging society. Exacerbating this reality are complicated workforce shortages and challenges that further strain families and systems. Policy solutions that augment and strengthen both the family caregivers and the professional caregiving workforce are essential to meeting nationwide long-term care needs.

**Technology solutions can support independence and health.** Technological opportunities to address care needs among an aging population are nearly endless and will become increasingly important for older adults, caregivers and aging industry stakeholders. Advancements in technology can assist with a spectrum of challenges facing an aging nation—from individualized solutions to help long-distance caregivers plan transportation for a loved one to enhanced interoperability between community-based services sectors and health care.

**Healthy aging requires a person and family-centered approach to care.** Our aging population is increasingly diverse across many spectrums. Race, socio-economic status, religious and cultural identification and sexual orientation are only a few of the factors that significantly influence an individual's experience as they age. Policymakers must understand that equitably enabling health and independence in later life requires embracing holistic, person and family-centered approaches to developing aging services options.

At the outset of a new decade—well into an unprecedented demographic shift—policymakers and leaders must recognize the realities facing our aging nation.

Together, we must expand existing, critical aging supports and services, but also identify innovative solutions to our current challenges, reject ageist thinking and commit to the value and opportunity that an aging population brings to society.