The Maturing of America
Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population

June 2011
Acknowledgements

This survey and report, “The Maturing of America—Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population” could not have been undertaken without the support of MetLife Foundation, which also made possible our 2005 survey and subsequent report. We are grateful for the Foundation’s strong commitment to the health and well-being of older Americans. We also appreciate the excellent work of the International City/County Management Association, which administered this survey. In addition, n4a wishes to thank its partners, whose involvement in every phase of survey development and promotion has been invaluable.

Participating organizations include:

**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a):** n4a is the leading voice on aging issues for Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and a champion for Title VI Native American aging programs. Through advocacy, training and technical assistance, we support the national network of 629 and 246 Title VI programs.

**MetLife Foundation:** MetLife Foundation was created in 1976 by MetLife to continue its longstanding tradition of contributions and community involvement. The goal is to empower people to lead healthy, productive lives and strengthen communities. Underlying the Foundation's programs is a focus on education at all ages and a commitment to increasing access and opportunity. The Foundation makes grants in health, education, civic affairs and culture.

**International City/County Management Association (ICMA):** ICMA develops and advances professional local government management to create sustainable communities that improve lives worldwide. In addition to supporting its nearly 9,000 members, ICMA provides publications, data, information, technical assistance, and training and professional development to thousands of city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.

**American Planning Association (APA):** APA is an independent, not-for-profit educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change.

**National Association of Counties (NACo):** NACo is the only national organization that represents county governments before the Administration and Congress. NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties.

**National League of Cities (NLC):** The NLC is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents.

**Partners for Livable Communities (Partners):** Partners is a nonprofit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development, and social equity. Since its founding in 1977, Partners has helped communities set a common vision for the future, discover and use new resources for community and economic development, and build public/private coalitions to further their goals.
Executive Summary

Two powerful phenomena have come face-to-face this year, demanding urgent attention. One is demographic: the rapid and dramatic aging of the U.S. population. In 2011, in communities across the country, the leading edge of the Baby Boom generation reached age 65. By 2030, more than 70 million Americans—twice the number in 2000—will be 65 and older. At that time, older adults will comprise nearly one in five Americans.

The other phenomenon is the Great Recession, which began officially in December 2007. In the U.S., despite initial signs of recovery, it continues to heavily influence policy, programs and planning. States continue to cut budgets, and municipalities are also financially distressed. As a result of the recession, spending for aging supports and services is shrinking—precisely at the time it is needed most.

With the convergence of these two forces, critical concerns come to the fore. How prepared are communities across America to tap the vast potential of the oncoming wave of older adults? How are policies in all dimensions of community life being adapted to support these individuals as they age in place, particularly during the most advanced years of their lives? What initiatives are underway to address the “maturing” of America?

To answer these questions, with support from MetLife Foundation, and in partnership with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), American Planning Association, National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, and Partners for Livable Communities, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) led a nationwide survey: “The Maturing of America—Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population.” The survey, administered in 2010 by ICMA, was intended to assess progress against benchmarks established in the first “Maturing of America” survey conducted in 2005. In both cases, the findings were eye-opening.

Key Finding: n4a’s report on the first survey, issued in 2006, found that, while many communities had some programs to address the needs of older adults, few had undertaken a comprehensive assessment to create a “livable community” for all ages, including the diverse population of those age 65+. The new survey reveals only limited progress in advancing this goal. Indeed, as a result of the severe economic challenges associated with the recession, most communities have been able only to “hold the line” — maintaining
policies, programs and services already established. Thus, they have not been able to move forward to the degree needed to address the nation’s current “age wave.” The survey captures encouraging steps forward in some areas, and retrenchment in others. But overall, it appears that many communities are struggling to maintain the status quo.

We call upon policymakers at all levels of government, but particularly at the local level, to move forward energetically—even if incrementally—to address the challenges at hand. We urge local community leaders—working with Area Agencies on Aging, universities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, other public sector entities and older adults themselves—to become champions and change agents who can break through the current stalemate. We hope that this report, which spotlights the ways some communities are doing just that, will inspire fresh momentum.

Specific Notable Findings

Advances: Notwithstanding the challenges faced by local governments, there have been notable areas of advancement by communities since the 2005 survey. Communities report the following:

- Increased support for older adults
  - A dramatic increase in the availability of *specialized training for public safety and emergency staff in dealing with older adults*, from 24% in 2005 to 59% in 2010. Such training is indispensable for those helping older persons during natural and manmade disasters.
  - Significant growth in the provision of *in-home support services for older adults*, from 71% in 2005 to 77% in 2010. This change responds to older individuals’ desire to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible, rather than being forced into institutional care.
  - Greater support for advanced education and retooling for the workforce
  - Significant increase in *programs that support older adults’ participation in local educational opportunities* (e.g. discounts, transportation), from 45% in 2005 to 52% in 2010. This finding likely reflects older adults’ desire for educational enrichment as well as to refresh workforce skills.
  - Expanded opportunities for older adult contribution to the community
    - Very significant rise in volunteer opportunities for older adults (e.g. arts, culture, human services), from 66% in 2005 to 80% in 2010. Communities are clearly acknowledging the invaluable resource represented by older volunteers, who can contribute in every dimension of civic and community life.

San Diego County, CA

The San Diego County Library has received national recognition for its innovative programs and extraordinary approach to community learning. Among its countless offerings, the library holds regular music and cultural events, computer classes in English, Spanish and Arabic, reading clubs for patrons of all ages, and adult literacy programs.
Challenges: Local governments identified three top challenges their communities face in meeting the needs of or planning for older adults. While responses varied, the challenges most often cited were financial/funding shortages, transportation and housing. This lineup contrasts with the top three identified challenges in 2005, which were, in the following order, housing, financial issues and various health issues.

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<th>2010</th>
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<td>1. Financial/funding shortages</td>
<td>1. Housing</td>
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<td>2. Transportation</td>
<td>2. Financial issues</td>
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<td>3. Housing</td>
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This articulation of current challenges is backed up by how local governments assess their economic condition:

- In 2010, only 42% of jurisdictions indicated they were experiencing *some growth*—a drop of 25 percentage points from the 67% reporting some growth in 2005.
- In 2010, 30% of local governments experienced *some decline*; a nearly three-fold increase from the 11% that reported that they experienced some decline in 2005.

Overall Findings
Following are capsule summaries of the findings of each section of the 2010 survey.

Programs & Services for a Maturing America:

- **Health care**—Over two-thirds (69%) of local governments report the availability of health care services that meet a range of needs. However, communities with larger populations are far more likely to provide/deliver these (all local governments of 1,000,000+ report doing so); older adults in more rural areas are at a significant disadvantage in securing health care services. This disparity is also true of prescription drug programs (other than Medicare Part D), wellness programs, preventive screenings and immunizations.
• **Nutrition**—Respondents indicate that congregate and home-delivered meals programs are available in 85% of communities, and more than half of local governments report that the meal provider/deliverer is a nonprofit or faith-based organization. A high percentage of communities (73%) also report the availability of nutrition education programs.

• **Exercise**—Over 70% of communities report the availability of exercise classes tailored to specific health concerns, such as heart disease, arthritis, diabetes and falls, and nearly 90% report the availability of local parks and other venues that have safe, easy-to-reach walking/biking trails. The Pacific Coast region leads the nation in the availability of both initiatives.

• **Transportation**—Programs that provide transportation to and from health care services, as well to other destinations (such as grocery stores and cultural events) are reported by over 80% of respondents, about the same as in 2005. Transportation options range widely in availability. Three-quarters of communities report having in place sidewalks and street crossings that are safe and accessible for older pedestrians; fewer report having sidewalk systems linking residences and essential services.

• **Public safety/emergency**—The percentage of local governments reporting specialized training for public safety/emergency staff in dealing with older adults more than doubled, to 59% from 24% in 2005. However, communities reporting plans in place for evacuation of older adults, if needed, decreased to 71% from 81% in 2005. Communities report a modest decline in availability of programs to detect and prevent elder abuse and neglect.

• **Housing**—Availability of programs to provide home maintenance and repair assistance, home modification and targeted service delivery to meet the needs of older adults (e.g. backyard trash collection, sidewalk snow removal) remains roughly the same as five years ago. Subsidized housing availability slipped to 63% from 70% in 2005.

• **Taxation and finance**—Reported property tax relief for older adults on limited incomes shows a steep drop in availability, to 54% from 72% in 2005. Availability of programs to educate and inform older adults about financial fraud and predatory lending has declined somewhat (to 65% from 69% in 2005), while availability of assistance with preparation of tax forms slightly increased.
• **Workforce development**—Forty-eight percent of respondents report the availability of workforce skills development services targeting older adults, while 39% report employer engagement/education programs.

• **Community and civic engagement**—A very significant *increase* in volunteer opportunities for older adults is reported, to 80% from 66% in 2005. Substantial engagement of older adults in local planning and decision-making processes is also reported, and close to 90% of respondents indicate that older adults are represented on advisory boards, commissions or committees that deal with planning issues that affect them.

• **Aging/human services**—There has been *significant growth* in availability of in-home support services for older adults since 2005, to 77% from 71%. Local governments report a drop in availability of a single-entry point model for services, to 37% from 42% in 2005.

**Planning & Policies that Benefit Older Adults:**

• **Strategic plan**—Only 30% of respondents report having in place a process that solicits input from older persons, and just over half that many (17%) report having comprehensive assessments and strategic plans in place. More however, note that they intend to institute such assessment and planning (26% and 27% respectively).

• **Land use planning**—Local governments are implementing land use planning tools to varying extents, with the master plan being the one most often in place (67%). Zoning that supports complete streets is reported by a majority of local governments (54%). Zoning requirements that support aging in place and active lifestyles for older adults (e.g. higher density, mixed-use development, and amenities) are reported by 44% of respondents.