Six hours, 700 watch parties and thousands of Tweets later, what did we learn from the White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA) held yesterday in Washington, D.C.?

We learned that the median salary for a professional caregiver in the United States is $13,000. We learned that companies like Uber and Airbnb are adapting their services to older users. We learned that almost one third of us know someone who has been the victim of elder abuse. We learned that a 91-year-old woman can change the way we think about design. We learned that despite a lack of federal funding for this once-a-decade conference, it’s possible to put on a pretty good show.

And we learned that it’s just not possible to cover all the important topics related to aging in just one day.

Nora Super, executive director of the conference, told Next Avenue she was pleased with the outcome. “I think the day was great. It was just a wonderful opportunity to bring everyone together. I think we touched on some issues that were tough issues like elder abuse and retirement savings, but were able to raise awareness of those.”

What Legacy to Leave

After a day of presentations and months of public discussion, participants praised the conference, noted some gaps and felt there is still much work to be done. Here is a roundup of what some of them said:

It’s up to us now to determine what legacy we want to leave to the next generation.

— James Appleby, Gerontological Society of America
Joe Ruby, president of the board of the National Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), said he was especially happy to hear President Obama say he would work with Congress to reauthorize the Older Americans Act. That line earned applause among the White House attendees and a standing ovation at the n4a WHCOA watch party in Philadelphia, Pa.

Ruby said he especially liked what he heard about new programs for veterans and wanted to hear more about federal initiatives to help older Americans of modest means. “What we need as a country is to think about how to provide some help for those people, to keep people from becoming indigent and eligible for Medicaid which is a huge expense for states,” said Ruby.

Michael Adams, executive director of Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE), said: “From SAGE’s perspective, it was a great day with the inclusion of LGBT elders (at the conference) and references in discussions. But also, we got two big policy announcements, one on housing discrimination from HUD (the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) and one on an important data collection initiative from the Administration on Aging.”

Attendee James Appleby, executive director of the Gerontological Society of America, said he applauds the work of organizers who put on a conference with no public funding and smartly used social media to broaden the conversation. Appleby was disappointed, however, that there was no discussion of the need for research into a myriad of health, financial and social issues and little discussion of long-term services and supports. He also said he would have liked to see a major program or initiative unveiled to address the need for long-term care.

He noted that he heard the word “research” only three times and in one instance it was to remark on the scarcity of research into elder abuse.

“We are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Medicaid and Medicare and the 80th anniversary of Social Security. These are programs that previous generations have left as a legacy to older adults in America, meaningful programs to protect financial and medical well being,” said Appleby. “It’s up to us now to determine what legacy we want to leave to the next generation.”

‘We Need to Play it Louder’

Author and home care worker activist Ai-Jen Poo wrote in the Huffington Post the day after she appeared on the conference’s caregiving panel: “It could sound like a broken record to say that there’s no better time than now to take stock of what we need to do to meet the needs of our elders and 21st-century families. But judging from yesterday, we need to play it louder.”

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) praised several new programs and initiatives announced in conjunction with the conference. “The White House Conference on Aging highlights the opportunities and challenges of an aging society,” NCOA President James Firman said in a statement Tuesday. “The 50 speakers presented many excellent ideas and reasons for both optimism and pessimism. NCOA calls for greater collaboration between the public and private sectors to help baby boomers and older adults navigate and weather — in the words of aging giant Arthur Flemming — ‘the hazards and vicissitudes of life.’”

As it took place, the conference was trending on Facebook and Twitter, and the conversation continues.

What did you think of the conference? What did it achieve and what deserved more attention? In case you missed it, Next Avenue summarized the events of the day and the WHCOA published a social media recap on Storify. You can also follow the hashtag #WHCOA on Twitter and read the President’s remarks.