

# AGENCY GUIDE



Supporting the Independence of Older Vermonters Since 1974



Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging (SVCOA) exists to be a community force in creating and sustaining opportunities for elders and caregivers in our region to help assure that elders are able to maintain maximum independence and quality of life.

## Since 2008:

- > Over **6,400** case management clients have received more than **147,000** hours of service and support
- > Over **728,000** community meals served to older Vermonters
- > Nearly **1.45 million** home delivered meals served to older Vermonters

## STATEMENT FROM SVCOA DIRECTORS

Friends and neighbors:

We'd like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves to you — or in many cases reconnect — and restate our unwavering commitment to serving the dozens of amazing, tight-knit communities that call southwestern Vermont home.

Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging has been working to ensure maximum independence and quality of life for older Vermonters in our region since 1974, a record of service that we are incredibly proud of and also determined to uphold.

While we hold tremendous respect for our origins and the tireless efforts of those before us who have helped build SVCOA over the years, we are most thankful for the Vermonters we serve – individuals and communities who have inspired SVCOA, our staff and our Board of Directors as professionals and as human beings beyond measure for decades.

Although the agency has evolved and adapted in countless ways since its inception, our core mission of supporting older Vermonters, caregivers, and younger Vermonters with disabilities, remains unchanged.

To this end, we strive each and every day to deliver the highest level of client service and care, offer myriad programs and resources to help clients meet their most important goals, always extend a listening ear, helping hand and compassionate heart, and continue to learn, recognize opportunities for improvement, and implement meaningful, positive change on behalf of those we serve.

While demand on SVCOA's programs and services will likely rise as Vermont's population continues to age, we are well-positioned for the challenge with a passionate, skilled and nimble team, thorough financial planning, and strong partnerships with key resources at the local, state and federal levels.

And, maybe more important than any other single factor, we are driven by the Vermont tradition of caring for our neighbors – a motivation that in part, is a product of all that our neighbors have given us.

We thank you for your friendship and the opportunity to continue to serve you and your communities, and hope that you find this guide to our various programs and services to be both helpful and informative.

As always, don't hesitate to give us a call or stop by and see us – we're always here for you.

Sincerely,

**Chris Adams**, *Development & Communications Director*

**Courtney Anderson**, *Nutrition Director*

**Rosemary Greene**, *Business Operations Director*

**Dana McMahon**, *Rutland County Aging Services Director*

**Jennifer Plouffe**, *Bennington County Aging Services Director*



## Thank You!

SVCOA is incredibly thankful for the many donors and community partners that support our work each year. Without their enthusiastic and unwavering support, it would be impossible to fulfill our mission and provide vital programs and services to the communities we serve in southwestern Vermont.

## ◀ SVCOA HELPLINE • 1.800.642.5119

*Assistance on all questions, big or small*

Our HelpLine is often the initial point of contact for those interested in SVCOA's programs and services, anyone who might have a general question, or an individual with a critical need. The HelpLine is a toll-free, confidential service that provides older Vermonters, caregivers and others with information, referrals and assistance toward accessing local, state or national resources and services. HelpLine staff, who are certified by the Alliance of Information Systems (AIRS), are there to listen and gather information, swiftly assess a situation or request, and ultimately provide accurate information or connect a caller with the appropriate SVCOA or external resources. Client service is a top priority for SVCOA, and it all starts with our HelpLine.

**"The biggest key to my job is listening to people and having a clear understanding of what they might be dealing with, that way we can help them in the best way possible. It's incredibly rewarding to have a caller tell me that we've helped relieve their worries and led them to the resources they need."**

*– Mary Muratorri, SVCOA Information & Assistance*



### Examples of types of information and assistance provided by the SVCOA HelpLine:

- > Referrals to area agencies and services
- > Resources for families caring for older family members
- > Transportation to medical appointments and essential shopping
- > Meals on Wheels
- > Community meal site information
- > Senior housing information
- > Home care options
- > Options for people who can no longer live alone
- > Assistance with Medicare and other insurance issues
- > Fuel, food, medical and financial assistance programs
- > Pharmacy assistance
- > Telephone credit assistance

## ◀ CASE MANAGEMENT & OPTIONS COUNSELING PROGRAM

*Always here to listen and help*

One of SVCOA's core offerings, the Case Management & Options Counseling Program brings together a range of skilled staff who specialize in working to give clients the support and opportunities to maintain or improve their independence and quality of life. SVCOA's state-certified, experienced Case Managers and Options Counselor work with and empower clients to make important life decisions around various services or supports, including long term care services. Often regarded for their compassionate nature and ability to find solutions for clients in the most pressing of times, SVCOA's Case Managers and Options Counselor are not only the agency's "faces in the field" in working one-on-one with clients, but are also adept at navigating the wide range of supportive programs that exist for clients of varying needs. As a result of their deep knowledge and person-centered approach, SVCOA's Case Managers and Options Counselor successfully serve thousands of clients each year between Bennington and Rutland counties, a service we are proud to offer to the communities of southwestern Vermont.

### General services provided by SVCOA Case Managers and Options Counselors include:

- > Working with older Vermonters to identify needs and talk about services and supports available to address these needs
- > Helping clients develop their own personalized plan with respect to services and supports
- > Direct assistance in connecting clients with desired services
- > Coordinating and monitoring services as necessary
- > Providing information, assistance and guidance to families and caregivers who are assisting older Vermonters
- > Facilitating conversations with caregivers or families about ongoing or future care needs

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*Case Management, continued***Examples of specific assistance offered by SVCOA Case Managers and Options Counselors include:**

- > Arranging and administering care plans for clients who qualify for services under the Medicaid Waiver Choices for Care program and the Veteran's Directed Program
- > Helping clients solve difficulties related to Social Security and Medicare
- > Assisting clients with the public benefits application process
- > Aiding clients in finding aides and housekeepers
- > Helping clients complete housing application processes
- > Helping clients apply for private funding for special needs as resources permit



**"I feel because of Kathy, I can still live independently in my own home with dignity."**

**– SVCOA client**



**"One of our primary objectives is to make sure older Vermonters are able to continue to live in the setting of their choice, rather than somewhere they don't want to be. This is made possible through clear communication and planning with a client, and strong collaboration with a range of community partners and resources."**

**–Vicky Potter, Case Manager**

**< ELDER CARE CLINICIAN PROGRAM***Support, on your terms in your setting*

The Elder Care Clinician Program is a collaborative effort between Rutland Mental Health Services and United Counseling Services - the mental health agencies serving Rutland and Bennington counties - and SVCOA. The program offers a range of mental and emotional health services to Vermonters age 60 and older who are primarily homebound and would have difficulty accessing office-based care. Our elder care clinicians provide these services in the security of a client's home, ensuring ease of access in a comforting setting. Additionally, elder care clinicians provide support to caregivers of those dealing with mental health issues so that they have the tools to manage their own challenges and stress.

**"I encourage people to be as candid as possible about what they think they need in terms of support, never be afraid to ask for help, and be determined to get the help they need and the outcomes they want. Persistence pays off."**

**–Cinda Donton,  
SVCOA / RMHS Elder  
Care Clinician**



## < NUTRITION PROGRAM

### *Nutrition aid and guidance, personalized for you*

Another pillar of SVCOA's service to Bennington and Rutland counties is its Nutrition Program, aimed at filling community nutrition gaps and providing nutrition education and counseling throughout our service area.

Within this overarching program is the well-known, national Meals on Wheels initiative, which SVCOA administers locally in southwestern Vermont. SVCOA's Meals on Wheels effort provides hundreds of thousands of free or low-cost, healthy, nutritious meals to older Vermonters each year – including both home delivered and community-based meals. Not only do these meals play an integral role in supporting those who are most nutritionally insecure, they also provide a range of additional benefits that can be equally as important. With each home-delivered meal comes a general health and wellness check, as well as social interaction that is valued by both meal recipients and Meals on Wheels volunteers. Similarly, the program's congregate meals offered regularly at dozens of easily-accessible public sites across our region help to support the nutrition needs of older Vermonters while also bringing seniors together in communal settings where they can socialize, learn about other services, resources and opportunities available to them, and ultimately remain active in their communities.

In addition to home delivered and congregate meals, SVCOA employs a registered dietician who provides personalized nutrition counseling to dozens of older Vermonters annually, as well as general nutrition presentations to various community groups.

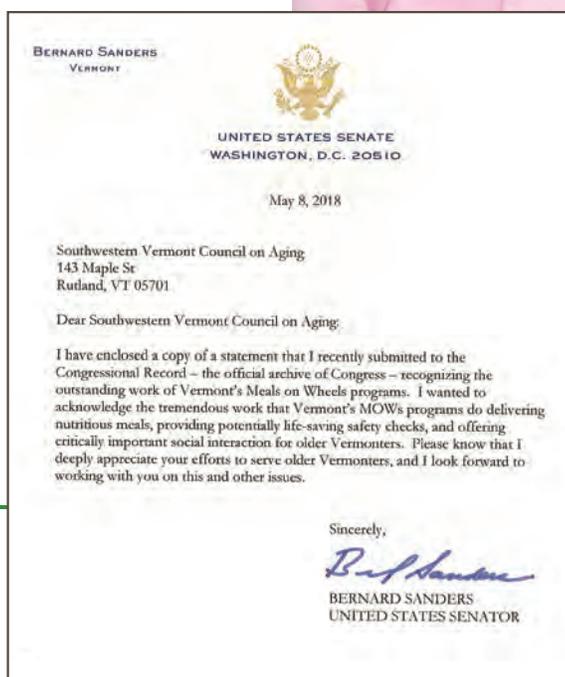
## < WELLNESS PROGRAM

### *Better living through better health*

One of SVCOA's newest services, the Wellness Program is based around the fundamental goal of promoting overall physical and mental health among older Vermonters in our region. Although in its infancy, the program is already making strides toward meeting this objective through several initiatives including "Tai Chi for Falls Prevention," a series of nationally-recognized and evidence-based classes aimed at improving the balance, strength and general health of seniors, wellness-focused fairs and educational presentations, and referrals to key community resources that offer programming specifically for older Vermonters, among other efforts. SVCOA believes in empowering and supporting individuals to remain energized and active in their communities – both physically and mentally – and our Wellness Program is here to assist with that process.

**"I love hearing older Vermonters' stories, learning about their lives, where they've been, what they did for work, what their family is like, it's always so wonderful to hear about the life someone has lived. I also love when our nutrition and wellness programs have a direct impact on maintaining or improving their overall health, or inspiring them to get involved in a new activity that energizes them."**

**—Anna White, Nutrition Assistant & 3SquaresVT Outreach Coordinator**



**One component of SVCOA's Nutrition Program is the Meals on Wheels initiative, which has earned national recognition. The program provides both home-delivered and community meals to older Vermonters.**





## < VOLUNTEER & SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAMS

*Caring for your neighbors, a Vermont tradition*

Central to several of the programs and services that SVCOA offers are the agency's many dedicated volunteers and senior companions. Coming from a wide range of backgrounds, SVCOA's volunteers and senior companions have one thing in common – they are all committed to helping older Vermonters lead healthy, happy and productive lives in the setting of their choice.

### Volunteers

SVCOA relies on a team of hard-working and knowledgeable volunteers to help the agency with a wide variety of tasks, all which work to support older Vermonters in our service area. Although unpaid, SVCOA's volunteers are invaluable to the agency, and more importantly to those it serves. The agency is regularly seeking new or additional volunteers to fill an assortment of roles including:

- > Home maintenance and modification assistance
- > S.H.I.P. – health insurance counseling
- > Meal delivery drivers for Meals on Wheels
- > Money Management Program assistance
- > Event assistance
- > Case Management assistance
- > Office / internship assistance
- > Friendly Visitor Program

### Senior Companions

Similarly, SVCOA's senior companions play an integral role in helping the agency meet the needs of its clients. The Senior Companion Program matches eligible, concerned older Vermonters with peers who are in need of assistance to continue to live independently. First introduced in 1968, the Senior Companion Program provides a small, tax-free stipend and other benefits to volunteers for their service.

#### Senior Companions Provide:

- > Assistance with important daily tasks
- > Reminders to take needed medication
- > Opportunities for sharing conversation, hobbies, etc.
- > Friendships that can last a lifetime

#### Senior Companion Eligibility Requirements:

- > Over 55 years of age
- > Have limited income
- > Are able to give 15 to 40 hours of service per week
- > Love to help your neighbors and peers

#### Senior Companion Benefits

- > Senior Companions receive a small (tax-free) stipend and other benefits such as mileage reimbursement, sick / vacation and holiday pay (NOTE: Becoming a Senior Companion will not affect any of your Social Security Income benefits)

**To learn how to become a volunteer with SVCOA, please contact 1-802-786-5990.**

***"The most inspiring aspect of my role with SVCOA is certainly the nature of our work - assisting and advocating for older Vermonters and caregivers. It is incredibly rewarding work, and I'm truly thankful to see it firsthand while collaborating with volunteers, senior companions and local caregivers alike."***  
***– Aaron Brush, Volunteer, Senior Companion and Caregiver Coordinator***

***"SVCOA is responsible for the quality of my life. I have no complaints, only the highest praise. You all are very caring people and you take your time to listen."***

***– SVCOA client***



## ◀ GREEN MOUNTAIN RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

*Valuing, engaging and connecting the talents of older Vermonters*

Green Mountain Retired Senior Volunteer Program (GMRSVP), an SVCOA and federally-funded sister program, is an additional avenue for interested older Vermonters to give back to their local community by using their diverse skills and experiences to address key community needs. The program, which operates across Bennington, Windham and Windsor counties, administers hundreds of passionate volunteers each year who work on a variety of projects including helping their peers with annual tax returns, providing meal deliveries, friendly visits and rides, leading wellness classes and activities, and serving as money management helpers.

For more information or to volunteer with GMRSVP, visit [www.rsvpt.org](http://www.rsvpt.org) or call 844-258-7877.



## Representative Payee Program

Approved by the Social Security Administration, as well as the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, our Representative Payee Program administers financial benefits for a beneficiary, who, due to mental or physical impairment as confirmed by a physician and the Social Security Administration, is unable to receive and manage these funds themselves. The goal of the program is to provide immediate financial stability, and over time, a greater sense of financial security and well-being for its clients. Additionally, the program ensures that a client's most basic and critical needs of food, shelter, clothing and medical care are met, while also allowing individuals to remain independent and in the community or setting of their choice.

## ◀ MONEY MANAGEMENT & REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE PROGRAMS

*Financial direction for stability and peace of mind*

One of several segments of the agency that has experienced significant growth and increased demand for service in recent years is our financial guidance arm, which encompasses both the Money Management and Representative Payee Programs. At their core, these two programs are ultimately designed to help older Vermonters, as well as younger disabled individuals, successfully manage their finances to ensure their overall stability and peace of mind.

**The SVCOA Money Management and Representative Payee services provides payment management for beneficiaries who are incapable of managing their Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments or Veteran's Benefits.**

### Money Management

SVCOA's Money Management Program partners trained, certified and insured volunteers with low income clients who have difficulty managing their financial affairs. After initial assessments and budget planning work, our volunteers work to organize bills, write checks and assist in sending payments for clients, as well as reconciling their checkbook.

**"The service you provided my dad has helped us immensely! Without your guidance I doubt I would have made the right choice. You are priceless to the community." – SVCOA client**



## STATE HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (SHIP)

*Education and assistance on all things Medicare*

Are you ever confused, stressed or unsure about your health insurance options? Understanding today's health insurance landscape can often be challenging, but our State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is here to help. SHIP offers free, confidential health insurance counseling to current or potential Medicare beneficiaries. Our trained and skilled SHIP staff is committed to educating, advocating for, and empowering individuals and their families to make informed healthcare benefit decisions.

### A few of the common issues that the program addresses include:

- > Finding a Part D (prescription drug) plan that works best for you
- > Comparing Medigap and other supplemental insurance policies
- > Transitioning from employer-based insurance to Medicare
- > Helping to clarify confusing medical bills and statements
- > Helping people understand the difference between an advantage plan (complete) and a supplemental plan (Medigap)
- > Providing clarity around enrollment periods for Medicare
- > Helping individuals understand how Medicaid and V-Pharm work with Medicare

**"I find it very rewarding to help older Vermonters maintain their ability to remain in the community. We can learn so much from older Vermonters if we listen to their stories and the wisdom that comes from those stories."**

– Rosemary Greene, Business Operations Director



## TRANSPORTATION

*Ensuring your mobility and independence*

Working in collaboration with a number of community transportation providers in Bennington and Rutland counties, SVCOA also helps to ensure that older Vermonters are able to get where they need to go, when they need to get there. Whether for regular, daily errands, important appointments, or to visit family and friends, SVCOA believes mobility, through easily-accessible public transportation, is critical to older Vermonters maintaining their independence and quality of life. As a result, SVCOA provides transportation funding, as well as ride coordination, to eligible older Vermonters and younger individuals with disabilities.

### Qualifying categories for SVCOA-funded transportation needs include:

- > Non-Medicaid critical care
- > Non-Medicaid medical needs
- > Accessing congregate meals
- > Accessing Adult Day Services
- > Essential shopping needs
- > Vocational commitments
- > Social or personal needs



**HelpLine**  
1-800-642-5119

#### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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Rutland, VT 05701  
(802)-786-5990

#### BENNINGTON OFFICE

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SVCOA is the proud sponsor and administrator of Meals on Wheels in southwestern Vermont.



Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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