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## **Healthy Aging:**

I am writing you today as a member of Connecticut Association of Resident Service Coordinators in Housing (CARSCH). We feel it is our duty to write a comment to WHCOA, given our role as advocates for the population of disabled and elder adults that we serve.

The members of CARSCH have come to realize that the top priority to address is the need for more affordable senior housing with affordable home care services for our elder adults. Our elder adults want to live independently. In order to accomplish this, there needs to be more housing. The wait list for tenancy at any given senior building illustrates this need. There is a great need for more housing that includes affordable support services such as home makers, health aides, nursing, meals, special lower rates for utilities, and transportation for medical appointments, shopping, and social events. The key is affordable living. Living on a fixed income in senior housing should mean including the necessary services to prevent costly and unneeded nursing home admissions. These services should be an automatic part of senior housing. There should not be a wait time for services; it should be part of the rental process. In addition to that, supports for those with memory impairment and/or behavioral health issues is crucial.

Connecticut is a wonderful state. I am truly blessed to be a Resident Service Coordinator (RSC) in Connecticut because we do have many services that other states do not. We need to keep those services that are working, fix the services that aren't, and add some new ones. The population of elder adults is increasing at a rapid rate. I'm not going to quote statistics because we've all heard them. With this population growing so fast, and with an increase in the diagnoses of conditions such as Alzheimer's and other dementias, care facilities and supports should increasingly be adjusting to meet these needs moving forward.

What is healthy aging and how can we achieve it? That is the key question. We believe the answer is having the proper tools to assist us. For many, this means having access to services and programs that provide those tools. I have worked with elder adults for over 20 years. I currently work in an independent-living apartment building for seniors. The word to remember is “independent”. This means that there are no extra services such as a nursing, maid services, meals, etc. My role as an RSC is to link the 145 individuals I serve to the tools, programs, and services that will enable them to maintain independence while assisting in providing them with a feeling of empowerment. They realize that these services do not limit their choices, but enhance their ability to be independent. I have assisted many clients with the application process to the Home Care Program. This program has made a tremendous difference in their lives, but it is a difficult process to apply for these services. It takes as long as six months for a person to complete the application process. Many of the individuals I’ve assisted are extremely frail. Some have wound up in the hospital a few times before the services could start, and once the services do start, there are far fewer hospitalizations and other deleterious results. We need to address the issues with availability for services through programs like the Home Care Program, and to change the application process to be more like the one that pregnant women utilize. If a pregnant woman had to wait six months for assistance, both the baby and the mother’s health would suffer because there would be no prenatal care in the interim. The same issues apply to frail elder adults. They can’t afford to wait six months for services to start; they will likely end up in a skilled nursing facility, where the cost of care is far greater.

Healthy aging; is there a more important or inclusive topic? It is said that if you don’t have your health, you don’t have anything. You all know that as we age, we have more issues with health. It is inevitable. Some face more issues than others, but we all change, and our ability is affected. A blind man was a guest speaker at a meeting I attended years ago. I’ll never forget him. He told us that he played golf, went skiing and continues to have a very active and productive life. His presentation focused on the concept that just because a person is disabled doesn’t mean that they can’t still do things. I’m sure that he has assistance. He certainly did not ski alone. In the parting words of his presentation, he said “goodbye to all you temporarily able bodied people.” That’s what he called us; temporarily able bodied. He said this was because most of us will face some level of disability. I’ve been told by many folks older than myself not to get old. I always say to this that there is only one alternative to getting old, and it’s not a good one. I myself plan to live to 130 and hope to pass in a rollerblading or skydiving accident at the time. I was also told by a gerontologist that 70 is the new 50, given an individual has good genes and does proper maintenance. Maybe I will make 130 and still be able to thrive, probably not skydive, but you never know.