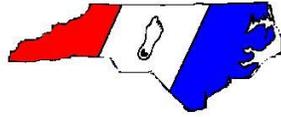


# **North Carolina**



## ***Senior Tar Heel Legislature***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
By: John Thompson

October 15, 2014

Raleigh, NC – The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) met in Raleigh October 9-10 for its final meeting of 2014. During the meeting, various committees met to discuss resolutions and establish NCSTHL priorities for the next two years. In addition, the group heard updates regarding budget cuts to vital programs for older adults and the importance of advocating on the behalf of older adults in the community.

The STHL 2014-15 new legislative priorities are: 1) Preserve or Restore Optional Medicaid Services; 2) Maintain funding for senior centers; 3) Strengthen and fund North Carolina’s Adult Protective Services Program; 4) Notify Medicare Patients Admitted for Observation.; 5) Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding. A more detailed explanation of these priorities can be found on the NCSTHL website at: <http://www.ncsthl.org>.

The meeting was rounded out with three informative guest speakers. Ms. Suzanne Merrill, the newly appointed Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services, provided a “Director’s Report for the NCSTHL” that focused on Legislative Updates and Implementation Activities. One area she highlighted was the reduction of funds for the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG). This particular block grant allows for the provision of a broad range of services designed to improve the quality of life for older adults. Merrill stated, “As you have probably heard, the HCCBG was reduced by \$969,549; this is a 3.1% recurring reduction.” She went on to say that “this is an area that is going to present a real challenge; this is an important program for older adults in North Carolina.”

Mary Bethel, Associate State Director for Advocacy AARP-North Carolina, discussed advocacy and how important it is to be able to communicate effectively with your representatives. She presented “Fourteen Points to Remember When Communicating with an Elected Official.” Effective and efficient communication will be vital as our state continues to face funding cuts such as the HCCBG. Elected officials need to hear from you!

Mental Health and Substance Abuse in older adults was also discussed during the two-day meeting. Ellen Schneider, MBA; Research Scientist at UNC-Chapel Hill, works in the Geriatric Education Center. She stated “The purpose of the center is to try and get the word out to the public about geriatrics and to make sure health care professionals don’t forget about older people and that they are trained properly. Needs do differ for the elderly as they get older.” Schneider offered statistics regarding mental health and depression among older adults. North Carolina is the 8<sup>th</sup> worst state in percentage of older adults experiencing mental health issues and depression (which is not a normal part of aging). In addition, nearly 20% of older adults at any one time do suffer from depression, which in many cases result in a 50% increase in health care expenditures. There are programs in North Carolina designed to help older adults manage their depression. Contact the UNC Geriatric Education Center for more information.

Traditionally, the last meeting of each year for the NCSTHL is when we hold our annual food drive. Canned and other goods are collected during the two day meeting and then delivered to a regional food bank or non-profit organization for further distribution to the needy. This is our fifth year holding the food drive and each year we surpass the previous in amount of goods donated. This year was no exception; well over two hundred pounds of goods were collected along with some generous cash donations to help those in need.

The STHL promotes citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the General Assembly and assesses the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly. Please feel free to contact your local delegate or your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). You can also visit the STHL website as well as our Facebook page, search for North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature. The next STHL meeting will be March 16-17, 2015.