

OLDER & WISER

Every person faces the challenge of aging. While our golden years may be some of the richest and most fulfilling of our lives, they can also present unique trials. We all hope that we and our loved ones will never experience an emergency, a tragedy, or the need to have someone makes decisions on our behalf. However, the fact remains that these situations do occur. That is why it is important to prepare for these events by planning for the future.

The *Older & Wiser* program provides information to older adults, their families, and their care givers on how to navigate legal situations they may encounter. Piloted and developed by Neighborhood Legal Services Association in Pittsburgh, PA, this program is a cooperative undertaking between local civil legal services, legislators, and private volunteer attorneys. Past seminars have focused on the following topics:

- Protection Through Powers of Attorney and Living Wills
- Dealing Effectively with a Healthcare Facility
- Guarding Against Senior Fraud (developed in association with the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General)
- Learning About Last Wills and Living Trusts
- Understanding Retirement Benefits (developed in association with the law firm of Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham, LLP)

Co-sponsoring legislators obtain an appropriate location for, schedule, and advertise the seminar. Each session includes a presentation by an expert pro bono attorney as well as a question-and-answer period. Attendees also receive referral information for legal services (including free and reduced-fee services for those who meet the income requirements). The local civil legal services organizations provide required equipment and staff and recruit private volunteers to deliver the presentations. Seminars are conducted at local venues such as high schools, community centers, municipal buildings, community libraries, and other easily accessible locations.

The *Older & Wiser* program was developed and piloted by the Neighborhood Legal Services Association in 2003. It is co-sponsored by state legislators serving southwestern Pennsylvania and by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services Consortium. The Consortium covers 14 counties in southwestern Pennsylvania and is comprised of Neighborhood Legal Services Association, Laurel Legal Services, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services. The program is now in the process of expanding across Pennsylvania.

When the *Older & Wiser* Program was launched in August, 2003, it received positive feedback from attendees and members of the legal community who were eager to participate. The program continues to grow and is expanding its services throughout the state. Soon, all elderly Pennsylvanians and their adult children will have access to the vital civil legal information provided by the *Older & Wiser* program.

The current *Older & Wiser* seminar is titled “Avoiding Missteps in Medicare and Medicaid.” To find a session in your area, visit www.nlsa.us. For more information, contact your local civil legal aid office (listed at www.palegalservices.org) or e-mail Laurie Mansell Reich, the *Older & Wiser* Project Coordinator, at lreich@alltel.net.