Executive Summary for Meeting the Challenges of an Aging Population with Success

The Columbus Foundation and the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations commissioned the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University to conduct a study of senior populations in Franklin County, Ohio. The purpose of the research is to understand the current and projected needs of seniors and to identify key opportunities for strengthening and improving their quality of life. The findings provide a framework for strategic programmatic, policy, and philanthropic investments.

In Ohio, there are approximately 1.6 million people over the age of 65, 14.2 percent of the total population. With 117,099 people over the age of 65, Franklin County has the second-highest number of seniors among all Ohio counties. Projection data from the Ohio Department of Development indicates that Franklin County’s 65-and-over population will grow from 115,706 in 2010 to 224,340 by the year 2040, representing a 94 percent increase.

Key Findings

Lack of awareness and connection to existing systems and supports
Franklin County has a robust network of senior supports, with a continuum of services and programs. However, it can be challenging to get plugged into existing resources and to navigate the system once connected.

Lack of coordination among many existing programs and resources
Coordination has been identified as a gap and the coordinating role of advocates has shown to have a significantly positive impact on seniors’ health and quality of life. Another important note is that the programs in place are a complex web of federal, state, county, and municipal resources that may benefit from improved coordination.

People age differently based on demographic, environmental, formative experiences, and lifestyle
There is a 20-year difference in life expectancy across ZIP Code boundaries in Franklin County. In addition, there are life expectancy differences by race, ethnicity, and poverty status.

New Tool for Franklin County
This study represents the first time the most vulnerable seniors in Franklin County have been identified on the neighborhood level through sound empirical methods. The Senior Vulnerability and Density index and corresponding map illustrate how to reach the highest number of vulnerable seniors. It also shows the staggering gulf in longevity among people living only a few miles apart and the cumulative impact of poverty and the corresponding lack of access to quality healthcare, education, and other predictors of a longer life.

Summary
By 2040, the number of seniors in Franklin County will double. To help prepare the community, The Columbus Foundation and Osteopathic Heritage Foundations have provided a rich analysis of the needs and opportunities for seniors. The Kirwan Institute has also provided its recommendations for community focus and investment.