



Pennsylvania
Department of Aging

Pennsylvania
Department of Health

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**Shapiro Administration Celebrates Older Americans Month by
Highlighting Connection
between Physical Activity and Lifelong Brain Health**

*State officials, medical experts and older adults gathered to highlight
how regular movement can help reduce the risk of chronic disease and dementia.*



Hershey, PA – In celebration of Older Americans Month, the **Pennsylvania Departments of Aging and Health** today partnered with **Penn State Health** to host an active health and wellness event to encourage physical fitness and lifelong brain health.

Aligning with the 2026 national theme, “[Champion Your Health](#),” state leaders joined older adults for a live SilverSneakers fitness demonstration followed by a tour of the on-site fitness and wellness facilities.

The event highlighted the strong connection between physical activity, healthy aging, and cognitive well-being, emphasizing how regular movement can help reduce the risk of chronic disease and support long-term brain health. Growing research continues to reinforce this connection. The [Lancet Commission](#) estimates that nearly 45 percent of dementia cases worldwide may be delayed or prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors such as increasing physical inactivity, eating a healthy diet, stopping smoking,

increasing social interaction, as well as addressing hearing loss, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

“Every May, Older Americans Month gives us an opportunity to celebrate the older adults who enrich our Commonwealth. This year’s theme, *Champion Your Health*, calls on us to put the goal of healthy aging into action,” said **Secretary of Aging Jason Kavulich**. “Physical activity is one of the most effective tools we have to preserve our independence, improve overall well-being, and support our brain health. We are thrilled to partner with Penn State Health to showcase how accessible, community-based fitness programs can help older Pennsylvanians stay active.”

Investing in Healthy Aging

Under the leadership of **Governor Josh Shapiro**, Pennsylvania has prioritized healthy aging and wellness through coordinated efforts across the Departments of Aging and Health, including [Aging Our Way, PA](#), the Commonwealth’s 10-year strategic plan to strengthen aging services and build healthier communities.

Complementing this work, the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s State Health Improvement Plan advances statewide strategies focused on chronic disease prevention, healthy aging, health equity, and improving community health outcomes. Through evidence-based initiatives addressing conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and other factors that impact long-term wellness, Pennsylvania is working to help older adults maintain their health, support brain health, and live independently in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

More than 280,000 Pennsylvanians over the age of 65 are living with Alzheimer’s, a disease that robs people of memory, mobility, independence, and time with the people they love. **Governor Shapiro** secured \$5 million in state funding in his 2025-26 budget to provide grants to research organizations seeking treatments and cures for neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s as well as ALS and Parkinson’s Disease and other related conditions. [Governor Shapiro’s 2026-27 proposed budget](#) includes another \$5 million for research, bringing the total investment if approved to \$10 million over two years.

Preventive measures, such as exercise and getting the shingles vaccine, are another way for older adults to stay healthy as they age.

Additionally, [new research shows](#) that getting the shingles vaccine can reduce older Pennsylvanians risk of developing dementia by at least 20 percent. The study also found that older adults who are already in cognitive decline can slow the progression of dementia.

“What is good for your heart is also good for your head, which is why everyday choices like diet, physical activity, and routine vaccinations matter so much as we get older,” said **Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen**. “Simple acts, like social activity, walks in the park and getting your shingles vaccines and flu vaccines are powerful steps that bolster your physical and mental health today and help protect your brain from dementia tomorrow.”

Highlighting Resources for Older Adults

In addition to promoting physical activity, the Department of Aging used the event to highlight chronic disease management and preventive wellness programs available through Pennsylvania's network of 52 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). These local programs, including diabetes self-management workshops, falls prevention classes, and cardiovascular health education, provide older adults with practical tools, education, and social support to better manage ongoing health conditions and remain safely in their homes and communities.

Penn State Health also plays a leading role in supporting the health and well-being of older adults through specialized geriatric care, clinical services, and programs focused on healthy aging. They work to help older adults maintain independence, manage chronic conditions, and improve quality of life through person-centered care. Their continued investment in geriatric medicine, wellness programming, and research reflects the important role health systems play in supporting Pennsylvania's growing older adult population.

"Healthy aging requires a proactive, multidisciplinary approach that addresses both physical health and cognitive function," said **Dr. Nicole Osevala**, chief of the Division of Geriatric Medicine at Penn State Health. "Through specialized geriatric care, we work closely with older adults and their families to identify cognitive changes early, optimize treatment plans, reduce medication-related risks and support overall physical and mental well-being with the goal of helping patients maintain their independence and quality of life as they age."

Pennsylvanians looking for local health and wellness programs, fitness classes, caregiver resources, or senior community center locations are encouraged to visit www.pa.gov/aging or contact their local Area Agency on Aging.

Media from this event can be downloaded here: <https://pacast.com/m?p=29461>

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