

2024-2028 Local Area Plan

Berks County Area Agency on Aging

PSA #32

Berks

October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2028



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction	4
Community Outreach & Needs Assessment.....	4
5 Goals.....	5
Agency Overview	6
Mission Statement, Vision, and Values.....	6
Description of the AAA.....	6
PSA Demographics	7
Community Outreach & Needs Assessment.....	9
Quality Management	10
Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Outcome Measures.....	11
Goals	11
Objectives & Strategies.....	12
Outcome Measures.....	14
Appendix 1: Assurances	20
Appendix 2: Data Source Citations	26

Executive Summary

Introduction

Developing a 4-year plan is always a challenge for our agency because we serve a diverse population with many different needs. Choosing which needs are the most critical and necessary can be difficult. Our goal is to develop a practical, comprehensive, feasible plan that targets the most critical needs within our community. This year, we took a unique approach and held eight (8) listening sessions across Berks County. We sought input from older adults, families, caregivers, providers, and other human service organizations. Our development process has never been so robust. We listened to our community and developed a plan that is diverse, inclusive, and achievable. We are confident that this 4-year plan will address the most critical needs of our community.

As the number of elderly people increases, so does the demand for support and assistance. In Berks County, individuals over the age of 65 were the fastest-growing population between 2010 and 2022 increasing by 31.1%. The Berks County Area Agency on Aging (BCAAA) is committed to serving as a community pillar for individuals and caregivers to access support and help meet their needs in their chosen care setting. In partnership with its Advisory Council and the Berks County Board of Commissioners, the BCAA has created Berks County's 2024-2028 Local Area Plan to comprehensively address the emerging needs of the elderly population over the next four (4) years. The plan aims to combine the priorities of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA), the requirements of the Administration on Community Living (ACL), and the needs of elderly and disabled Berks County residents. The objectives and strategies were developed based on PDA's Aging Our Way, PA 10-year strategic plan, key areas identified by ACL, a demographic analysis, and input from stakeholders, community leaders, local officials, and Berks County residents over 60 years old. This plan is reviewed annually at the fall Annual Public Hearing in conjunction with an Advisory Council meeting.

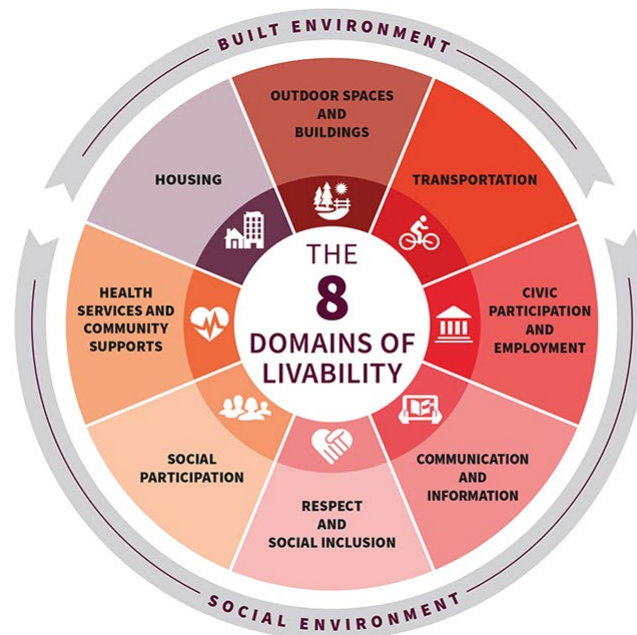
This 4-year plan has five (5) goals, eleven (11) corresponding objectives, and measurable strategies that are focused on the needs of older adults in Berks County. It has been developed to increase the promotion and awareness of services and supports available to older adults and their caregivers while removing barriers and building on innovation and efficiencies that can be made to improve service delivery. There continues to be a focus on reaching underserved and diverse populations in the community and expanding our outreach. The plan also addresses internal areas to improve the delivery of services through ongoing staff training and sets a commitment to ensure all older adults have a point of contact with the BCAA and its contracted providers to obtain resource education and assistance with linkage to services. In addition, it targets a continued commitment to increase partnerships with community organizations and use data to make evidence-informed decisions regarding the needs of the community.

Community Outreach & Needs Assessment

This 2024-2028 plan is unique in that eight (8) Listening Sessions were held throughout Berks County to gain input for this plan and PDA's **Aging Our Way, PA** 10-year strategic plan. The following is a list of listening session dates and locations.

Date	Location
August 9, 2023	Centro Hispano, 25 North 2nd Street, Reading, PA 19601
August 14, 2023	Wyomissing Public Library, 9 Reading Boulevard, Reading, PA 19610
August 15, 2023	Boyertown Area Multi-Service, 200 West Spring St., Boyertown, PA 19512
August 16, 2023	Berks Encore Reading, 40 North 9th Street, Reading, PA 19601
August 23, 2023	Berks Encore Mifflin, 30 Liberty Street, Shillington, PA 19607
August 24, 2023	Berks Encore Strausstown, 44 East Avenue, Strausstown, PA 19559
August 30, 2023	Senior LIFE Reading: 20 Shelbourne Road, Reading, PA 19606
September 25, 2023	Abilities in Motion, 755 Hiester Lane, Reading, PA 19605

Each listening session was a guided discussion around AARP’s Eight Domains of Age-Friendly Communities. They allowed us to receive feedback from Berks County residents regarding their current needs and what they see as future needs to help us develop this 4-year plan. Our plan and PDA’s *Ageing Our Way, PA* 10-year plan have been designed simultaneously to identify the priorities, strategies, and tactics that promote the health, well-being, and quality of life of older adults and prepare the Commonwealth and Berks County for a larger, longer-living older adult population.



5 Goals

The five (5) goals identified for Berks County were developed based upon listening session feedback from Berks County, statewide listening session feedback, and upon review of PDA and ACL’s goals. The goals are comprehensive and are intended to hit a broad spectrum of needs.

Goal 1: We will raise public awareness of services and programs for older adults through the provision of understandable information that reaches the local community.

The goal is to serve more older adults in Berks County. This is crucial because the aging population in the area is growing, and the Area Agency on Aging needs to be developed as a center for information and referral. As more people become aware of the agency, there will naturally be a greater need for enhancing the programming and services offered. To achieve this goal, we will focus on several strategies, including creating a Dementia Friendly Berks County, improving nutritional support for older adults, educating the community about available services, supporting caregivers, and raising awareness about elder abuse. Some of these strategies are repeated under other goals in the plan, but this shows how the objectives are interconnected and based on the needs of the community.

Goal 2: We will develop steps to overcome barriers that prevent older adults from staying connected to their communities and promote opportunities to engage with their communities how they choose.

This goal addresses several different critical areas where older adults experience barriers within their communities. The barriers can be lack of knowledge, social isolation, medical needs, suicide, and even risk of overdose. We strive to enhance our internal intake processes to identify older adults at risk for suicide and those currently experiencing social isolation. We also have several strategies to address post-COVID healthcare needs by increasing the number of evidence-based programs provided, promoting immunization awareness, and addressing the increasing number of older adults fatally overdosing on opioids.

Goal 3: We will support and engage in opportunities that offer equitable, affordable, and available options and opportunities that older adults may choose from for healthy and engaged lives, regardless of ability; socioeconomic status; racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds; or geographical location.

This goal is intended to improve access to services for underserved populations. The strategies under this goal aim to improve and increase awareness of the services we provide to older adults belonging to diverse and underserved populations.

Goal 4: We will promote Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to ensure older adults can live where and how they choose.

This goal is primarily focused on improving our Agency's ability to educate and support older adults in accessing needed services in the setting of their choice. One of the main strategies is to be the support in the community for those who have questions or need help in understanding a complicated and sometimes convoluted service system. We continue to strive to be the hub for aging service and information in Berks County and our community.

Goal 5: We will support, educate, and inform family caregivers to ensure more sustainable, competent, and appropriate care for older adults.

This goal is aimed at supporting caregivers to enable older adults to remain in less restrictive care settings. To achieve this, we will develop a caregiving workshop and work with our community partners to educate them on the available services. We will also focus on improving the well-being of caregivers and highlighting their value.

Agency Overview

Mission Statement, Vision, and Values

The mission of The Berks County Area Agency on Aging is to provide services, based on need, to all older Berks County residents and those with disabilities; empowering self-determination; advocating for their rights; and promoting the highest possible level of independence.

PDA Mission: The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging is to promote independence, purpose, and well-being in the lives of older adults through advocacy, service, and protection.

Vision: The 4-year state plan, in Coordination with Aging Our Way, PA, will guide PDA and the 52 AAAs in Pennsylvania's Aging Network as we work collectively to provide older adults across the Commonwealth with the resources they need to age with dignity and respect and continue to be vital, active members of their communities. With these plans, we commit to creating a state in which every Pennsylvanian, and especially older adults, can experience happiness, dignity, and fulfillment.

Description of the AAA

The BCAA was established as a department of the Berks County government in 1974. As one of 52 Area Agencies on Aging within Pennsylvania, BCAA serves Berks County residents through a variety of services and programs. The Agency coordinates and maintains a comprehensive service system to meet the needs of all Berks County residents aged 60 and older.

The BCAA oversees programs required by the Older Americans Act. The current staffing structure includes 45 full-time staff that provide direct service to older adults. The direct services provided include Intake and Assessment, Public Outreach and Education, OPTIONS and Caregiver Support Program Care Management, Ombudsman, and Protective Services. The Agency also holds 46 contracts with providers.

The BCAA is governed by the Berks County Board of Commissioners, which consists of three elected Commissioners. Commissioner Christian Leinbach has been a county commissioner since 2011, Commissioner Michael Rivera has been a county commissioner since 2020, and the newest Commissioner, Dante Santoni, Jr. took office in January 2024.

The Agency also has a 15-seat Advisory Council. The Council is comprised of a multidisciplinary team of professional and retired individuals. All the positions on the council are appointed by the commissioners, with council member input and recommendations. Our Advisory Council is routinely engaged in programmatic changes and need areas. Along with the Agency’s Administrative Team, the Advisory Council assists in overseeing the planning process.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2015 and 2022 the population of Berks County grew by 3.7%, from 415,218 to 420,152. For comparison purposes, the US growth was 3.9% and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania grew by 1.4% during the same period.

In 1985, older adults accounted for 11% of the US population. By 2010, they were 13%. The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to increase from 58 million in 2022 to 82 million by 2050, a 47% increase. By 2030, as the last Baby Boomers turn 65, older adults are expected to reach 20% of the population. After that, the population is expected to level off, but the absolute number of individuals aged 65+ will keep growing.

Berks County Population by Age Group				
Age Group	2015	2015_%	2022	2022_%
0 to 4	24,498	5.9%	22,688	5.4%
5 to 19	82,628	19.9%	81,089	19.3%
20 to 34	78,061	18.8%	80,669	19.2%
35 to 49	76,400	18.4%	74,787	17.8%
50 to 64	85,950	20.7%	84,451	20.1%
65+	67,681	16.3%	76,468	18.2%
	415,218	100.0%	420,152	100.0%

According to the 2022 United States Census Bureau's report, the population of Berks County consists of 69.7% Caucasian, 4.6% African American, 1.2% American Indian, 1.2% Asian, 15.1% two or more races, and 8.2% some other race. The Census data also reveals that 24.5% of the total population in Berks County identifies as Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, 9% of Berks County's residents are foreign-born.

In terms of residents over 60 years old, 8.6% of individuals from any race identify as Hispanic or Latino. 86.9% of residents over age 60 identify as white alone and not of any Hispanic or Latino origin. 77.9% of Berks County residents speak English at home. 22.1% speak a language other than English.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of males in Berks County aged 60 and older increased by 16% and females increased by 19% from 2015 to 2022. The total number of women in Berks County aged 60 years and older remains higher than men with currently over 58,000 women versus over 48,000 men.

The poverty rate in Reading, PA decreased from 34.5% to 29.3% between 2020 and 2021, marking a 5.2% decline. In 2022, 10.9% of Berks County residents were living in poverty, while 10% of individuals over the age of 65 were also living in poverty.

The unemployment rate in Berks County declined between 2019 and 2023 from 4.6% to 3.7%. Many older adults opt to exit the workforce when reaching retirement age; however, living on a fixed income places older Americans in poverty. Therefore, an increasing number of older adults are maintaining employment after retirement age.

The median household income in Berks County has been steadily increasing. In 2018, the median income in Reading was \$30,087, which increased to \$38,738 in 2021. Similarly, the median household income in Berks County grew by over 21% from \$61,522 in 2018 to \$74,617 in 2022. As of 2021, the percentage of households earning less than \$50,000 decreased to 32.1%, while the percentage of households earning between \$50,000 to \$99,999 is 35.6%, and households earning over \$100,000 account for 32.3%.

The number of adults 25 years and older with less than a high school education in Berks County fell by 1.54% since 2016. The senior population grew up in a time when education attainment was typically lower, and college attendance was less widespread. As this population is succeeded by younger and increasingly well-educated individuals, the percentage of the population that has attained higher levels of education is slowly increasing.

Education Attainment (25 years and older)	Count	Percentage
Less Than 9th Grade	13,887	4.75%
9th to 12th Grade	20,977	7.18%
High School Graduate	106,889	36.58%
Some College	45,098	15.43%
Associate’s Degree	26,999	9.24%
Bachelor’s Degree	50,120	17.15%
Graduate Degree	28,243	9.67%

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Berks County has been compared to other similar counties in terms of mortality, morbidity, health, and social factors. Berks County has shown favorable results when it comes to Alzheimer's disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, and diabetes deaths. This indicates that residents of Berks County are less susceptible to these conditions compared to similar counties. Berks County also has better results compared to peer counties regarding whether seniors face cost barriers to healthcare and whether they have limited access to healthy food. However, Berks County has moderate results in comparison to peer counties when it comes to cancer, chronic kidney disease, coronary heart disease, adult obesity, older adult depression, and older adult preventable hospitalizations.

On the negative side, Berks County has shown the worst results for stroke deaths, older adult asthma, and access to primary care. According to the Pennsylvania State Data Center, Berks County has the highest mortality rate for cerebrovascular diseases in Pennsylvania.

Housing continues to be a major concern for older adults residing in Berks County. Approximately 70% of the county's inhabitants own their homes, while approximately 29.2% of them rent. Amongst those who own homes, almost 87.7% live in a family household that is part of a married-couple family. However, only 12.3% of renters are part of a family household. In addition, 56% of homeowners live in a non-family household, either alone or with a non-family member, while 44% of renters live in a non-family household. In terms of the older adult population, 59.8% of them own their homes, and 40.2% are renters. These figures reveal the

potential for housing issues as over half of the older adult population in the county own their own homes, which can put them at an increased risk for unaffordable expenses. Expenses like taxes and home repair costs have historically been ongoing challenges for older adults on fixed incomes.

Over the past 5 years, we have spent an average of \$1.6 million each year on food-related expenses. These expenses include Home Delivered Meals, Congregate Meals, and produce supplements for these meals. These services are essential to ensure that older adults in Berks County, both in rural areas and the city of Reading, have access to sufficient and nutritious food. Berks County is unique in that there is a waiting list for the Senior Food Box program run by the local food bank, Helping Harvest. We remain committed to supporting various programs to enhance food security and nutrition for older adults.

Community Outreach & Needs Assessment

The BCAAA has two (2) main priorities as a state-funded entity in Berks County. The first is to provide education and services to diverse consumers over the age of 60 and their caregivers. The second is to understand local needs, how they relate to changes in funding, and to advocate at the State and local levels for the senior population in Berks County. Each of the 2024-2028 area plan objectives addresses these two priorities in some manner.

Objectives targeting underserved and diverse populations and promoting existing services have been the primary driving force of this plan. Given the growing elderly and impoverished populations in Berks County, it is vital to ensure that community education stakeholder engagement and advocacy is at the forefront of the Agency's short and long-term plans.

Throughout Berks County, eight (8) listening sessions were conducted to gather community input on critical areas that need to be addressed for both Pennsylvania and Berks County. These sessions were attended by older adults who identified several key areas of concern. After compiling their feedback, the top 5 topics most identified included:

- 1 - Lack of affordable housing/rent too high
- 2 - Lack of transportation services that are easily accessible and affordable
- 3 - Lack of access and ability to navigate technology
- 4 - Property tax costs
- 5 -Low pay for caregivers / Personal Care facilities not affordable / Improved outdoor accessibility for walking paths, benches, and bathrooms

In addition to the listening session feedback, a full review of data provided by the 2022 Census Report, The Penn State Data Center, and specific data provided by the Berks County Planning and Economic Development were utilized. Also, a full analysis of programs and services was completed going back to 2016. The importance of looking at data relative to the use of our programs and services between 2016 and 2019 was to get a pre-Covid analysis. This plan provides a comprehensive review of current programs and strategizes for future programming.

Berks County is a diverse county with many social and economic needs. The analysis also identified social isolation as an area that needs attention, particularly among the older adult population. This is due to seniors living longer, families not being local, and less community support provided by neighbors and friends. To address this issue, Senior Community Centers serve as the initial point of contact for older adults and are viewed as the gateway into Aging services. The goal is to support seniors, provide education, and a sense of community to enhance their ability to remain independent. There are currently eight (8) Senior Community Centers in Berks County that strive to provide community engagement and involvement for the senior population. The centers cater to the local community's needs and culture, making their programming a vital component of the plan, which targets the issue of social isolation. Aging services remain at the forefront of planning, and the agency is seeking to improve access to services to combat isolation and meet

older adults' needs. With the right information and assistance, isolation can be avoided, which is why the agency is strategizing to redevelop the Berks County Senior Community Centers as hubs of information in the community and develop initiatives to carry this forward.

The plan also allows us to plan for integral need areas such as senior nutrition needs. Not only through the management of the Home Delivered Meals Program and the Senior Centers we have committed and will continue to commit funding to combat food insecurity for older adults. We have committed to continue our Produce Plus program which provides a fresh produce and dairy supplement daily to Home Delivered Meals recipients.

We are dedicated to improving our approach to serving the needs of transgender and non-binary people. Our goal is to ensure that everyone feels comfortable discussing their gender and that we are continuously learning and growing in this area. To achieve this, we have developed a plan that includes strategies for greater inclusion through programming and partnerships with local LGBTQ service providers. Additionally, we are committed to allocating resources to support those with limited English proficiency.

Quality Management

Quality assurance has always been an essential aspect of BCAA's services. Quality management goes beyond monitoring program compliance; it also involves routine analysis of budgeted funds and costs. Our responsibility is not only to manage programs for older adults in Berks County, but also to use funds effectively to ensure quality and program integrity are maintained. The plan's goals and strategies will require a multi-disciplinary approach. We have approached this plan as an opportunity to build new and fortify existing collaborations.

This is demonstrated by our decision in 2023 to no longer subcontract OPTIONS and Caregiver Support Program care management services. After careful analysis, we found that managing this program in-house would allow us to serve older adults in Berks County better and provide more streamlined access to services. Almost nine months later, we are seeing the benefits of this decision through a more seamless program transition, better linkage to services, and a more thorough understanding by staff of the critical role of care management within our organization.

We conduct annual monitoring of all contracted providers. We monitor for compliance with contract and program standards and consumer satisfaction. If the monitoring identifies areas for improvement, we work with the provider to develop an action plan to address the deficiencies. We routinely monitor the programs provided within our organization by setting ongoing quality management standards for each program. Our quality management standards go beyond the Aging program requirements to ensure that services are delivered effectively and efficiently to serve the older adults of Berks County. Aside from performance measures, we also closely monitor spending and trends to aid in program planning. By monitoring the money spent and the number of individuals served over the past four fiscal years or more, we can identify gaps in services and target areas where improvements are needed. This allows us to plan the full expenditure of funds each fiscal year.

After a thorough review of the data, it has become evident that continued community education is crucial for reaching older adults in Berks County. Our strategies aim to address the needs of underserved and diverse populations. We have collaborated with various organizations to provide a rich bank of resources to help address these needs. We plan to engage with other community collaborations to begin plan development to make Berks County Dementia Friendly and focus on providing education and resources for caregivers.

Based on overdose rates in the 65-plus population, this is a fast-growing area of need. We are working with Berks County's Council on Chemical Abuse (COCA) to enhance medication safety and address the growing number of individuals over 65 who are overdosing on opioids.

The aging Hispanic community in Reading is an underserved population in Berks County. The BCAA continues to provide a robust information bank to Spanish-speaking Berks County residents, but this is an ever-growing population that we have addressed through multiple objectives and strategies. Our goal is to reach these underserved populations and develop our Agency as a crucial provider of services to meet the needs of the Hispanic and Spanish-speaking populations.

Moving forward, we have identified staff development as another key area. We are targeting resources in our community to enhance our outreach to underserved populations. In addition to community campaigns, multiple strategies are focusing on staff education to improve the outcomes of inquiries received and linkage to services. Also, sensitivity training for staff in working with LGBTQ older adults is part of this plan.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Outcome Measures

Goals

The framework for the goals set forth in this 4-year plan was based on ACL's 5 Key Topic Areas:

1. Older Americans Act (OAA) Core Programs
2. COVID-19
3. Equity
4. Expanding Access to Home and Community Based Services
5. Caregiving

Our goals were created to address the needs of our community around comprehensive ACL topic areas. During the development of these goals, we noticed a few common themes and keywords that emerged. These themes included community, barriers, education, and support. By focusing on these keywords, we were able to develop a common theme. In the following section, we describe how our goals take into account each key topic area, and you will see how we address them through our strategies and performance measures.

Goal 1: We will raise public awareness of services for older adults and community partners and provide information that reaches the local community and is understandable. Develop and enhance programs to resolve challenging problems that older adults face in their daily lives.

This goal covers many important areas, including Older Americans Act programs, raising awareness of services for older adults, nutritional needs, and preventing elder abuse. It also aims to promote equity by reaching out to those with the greatest social and economic needs in Berks County. Additionally, it focuses on improving caregiving and making Berks County a more dementia-friendly community.

Goal 2: We will develop steps to remediate barriers that prevent older adults from staying connected to their communities and promote opportunities to engage with their communities how they choose.

This goal highlights the importance of the services that make it possible for older adults to live independently and the need to remove barriers that are facing our community. The COVID-19 pandemic created an increased level of social isolation in the older adult community and a need to reconnect with healthcare needs. It recognizes the need for education regarding suicide risk in older adults and also promotes immunizations and health promotion.

Goal 3: We will design and offer equitable, affordable, and available options and opportunities that older adults may choose from for healthy and engaged lives, regardless of ability; socioeconomic status; racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds; or geographical location.

This goal focuses on equity and intends to ensure services are reaching older adults in our community with the greatest economic and social need including but not limited to individuals with limited English proficiency, low-income minority older adults, and older adults residing in rural areas.

Goal 4: We will promote Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to ensure older adults can live where and how they choose.

This goal focuses on the importance of older adults aging in place where and how they choose. We aim to enhance and expand staff and community education regarding HCBS and reduce barriers to enable seniors to remain in their homes by working with current and new community partners.

Goal 5: We will support, educate, and inform family caregivers to ensure more sustainable, competent, and appropriate care to older adults.

This goal highlights the crucial role of family caregivers in the community and the importance of supporting their physical, emotional, and financial well-being. It also aims to educate caregivers about the resources available to them to ensure the best possible care for the older adult in need. It also works to enhance the utilization of the OAA core programs.

Objectives & Strategies

Goal 1: We will raise public awareness of services and programs for older adults through the provision of understandable information that reaches the local community.

- Objective 1.1: Enhance community education and awareness of aging services.
 - Enhance media campaigns to educate the community on Aging services and supports. Focus on targeting diverse and underserved populations.
 - Continue to develop relationships with local legislators to provide education on programs and services.
 - Enhance elder abuse education and outreach to the community.
 - Work with community leaders and organizations to convene, engage and act together to foster a Dementia Friendly Berks County.
- Objective 1.2: Develop programming to address the nutritional needs of older adults.
 - Supplement and enhance nutrition programs for older adults in Berks County.

Goal 2: We will develop steps to overcome barriers that prevent older adults from staying connected to their communities and promote opportunities to engage with their communities how they choose.

- Objective 2.1: Increase staff awareness of loneliness and social isolation for older adults.
 - Utilize screening tools for suicide risk & social isolation for staff and community members.
 - Implementation of PDA's Health IDEAS program to promote social connections for older adults experiencing isolation.
- Objective 2.2: Promote programming and resources available to older adults to encourage community engagement.
 - Identify the awareness of virtual access and programming available to older adults.
 - Improve resource information in Agency admission packets for case managed programs to increase awareness of: Senior Centers, exercise programs, evidence-based programs/health & wellness, assistive technology and County Tax Deferral Program.
 - Evaluate and improve upon information provided to all Senior Center participants. Include information regarding exercise programs, evidence-based programs/health & wellness, immunization information, health risks related to social isolation, assistive technology, medication safety opioid education and County Tax Deferral Program.
- Objective 2.3: Post-COVID reconnection to health care needs for older adults.
 - Develop a plan to create partnerships with local health care providers (i.e.: hospitals, clinics, direct care providers) to focus on the reduction of health care barriers for older adults and the promotion of immunizations.

- Partner with Berks County’s Council on Chemical Abuse and the SOS Berks Opioid Coalition to create awareness of medication safety, the increased risk for older adults, and opioid overdoses.

Goal 3: We will support and engage in opportunities that offer equitable, affordable, and available options and opportunities that older adults may choose from for health and engaged lives, regardless of ability; socioeconomic status; racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds; or geographical location.

- Objective 3.1: Improve access and availability of services among vulnerable and underserved populations and promote cultural and language accessibility.
 - Provide and identify training for Agency staff on cultural awareness and competency strategies to increase their skillset for servicing diverse and underserved populations.
 - Support cultural experiences, promote innovations, and expand programming in the community to attract new consumers and provide more opportunities for social engagement from diverse and underserved populations.
 - Create and distribute information that is accessible for outreach and communication, including parameters for multiple languages, accessible formats, print and digital media, and dissemination channels to ensure cultural and linguistic competency and incorporation of best practices to reach all older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers.

Goal 4: We will promote Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to ensure older adults can live where and how they choose.

- Objective 4.1: Expand our support to older adults for access to HCBS.
 - Conduct targeted education to community partners and providers, providing tools needed to make referrals.
 - Develop a plan to improve internal Agency processes and protocols for assisting individuals attempting to access HCBS and supports.
- Objective 4.2: Reduce barriers to enable seniors to remain in their home.
 - Advocate with community and legislators to address housing needs for seniors in Berks County.
 - Maintain partnership with the Berks County Tax Claim office to aid seniors in applying for the tax deferral program.
 - Meet with the local transportation authority (BARTA) to discuss geographic and financial shared ride service barriers.
 - Engage OPTIONS providers and develop a plan to meet the needs of rural HCBS recipients.
- Objective 4.3: Utilizing long-term care Ombudsman Program for individuals receiving HCBS.
 - Educate care management staff regarding the parameters of the Ombudsman program and appropriate referrals to assist individuals that are having issues with HCBS.
 - Educate Ombudsmen regarding proper advocacy for consumers receiving HCBS.

Goal 5: We will support, educate and inform family caregivers to ensure more sustainable, competent, and appropriate care to older adults.

- Objective 5.1: Expand awareness, outreach, education, and access to programs, services, and products to optimize the physical, emotional, and financial well-being of family members.
 - Improve family caregivers’ access to information and referral while focusing on diverse and underserved populations.
 - Provide training to family caregivers on caregiving basics, safe handling techniques, dementia and other related conditions, legal issues, and general aging services.
 - Improve access to technology to support caregiving.

- Objective 5.2: Recognize, include, and support family caregivers as key partners in the provision of health care and long-term services and supports.
 - Agency Staff training to recognize and value the role and needs of family caregivers by utilizing empathetic listening and assisting with real life problem solving when interacting with family caregivers.
 - Develop and implement an outreach plan to educate the public and community partners who provide personal assistance about family caregiver needs and processes for referral.

Outcome Measures

Definition and description of outcome measures and target dates identified under each goal, objective, and strategy.

Goal 1: To raise public awareness of services and programs for older adults through the provision of understandable information that reaches the local community.		
Objective 1.1: Enhance community education and awareness of aging services.		
Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Enhance media campaigns to educate the community on Aging services and supports. Focus on targeting diverse and underserved populations.	a. Ensure all current brochures and advertising are offered in Spanish. Measure: b. Measure annually the number of advertisements through different media outlets. c. Target areas in county that have larger Latino population for outreach and promotional purposes. d. Target media outlets for advertising that serve the Latino population in Berks County (i.e.: radio commercials and magazines) e. Promote programming and services with local LGBTQ chapter.	a-e. To begin July 2024 and continue to be budgeted over next 4 fiscal years.
2. Continue to develop relationships with local legislators to provide education on programs and services.	Routine communications with Berks County legislators Measure: a. Quarterly newsletters b. Annually invite legislators to 1:1 meeting.	a & b. To begin July 2024 and continue to be budgeted over next 4 fiscal years.

<p>3. Enhance elder abuse education and outreach to the community.</p>	<p>Engage the Berks County Elder Abuse Task Force to develop educational presentations for financial institutions, law enforcement and other aging service providers in the community.</p> <p>Measure:</p> <p>a. Utilize social media platforms to target elder abuse awareness, scam education and reporting information.</p> <p>b. Budget funds to continue elder abuse awareness posters, billboards, and signage throughout the community.</p> <p>c. Tracking the number of presentations and individual participants.</p>	<p>July 2024 and ongoing</p> <p>a & b. FYs 2024/25, 25/26 and 26/27</p>
<p>4. Work with community leaders and organizations to convene, engage and act together to foster a Dementia Friendly Berks County.</p>	<p>Measure:</p> <p>a. Identify community partners willing to work with in the development of a dementia friendly Berks County.</p> <p>b. Apply to become a Dementia Friendly Community.</p>	<p>Begin process January 2025 complete by December 2026</p>

Objective 1.2: Develop programming to address the nutritional needs of older adults.

Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
<p>1. Supplement and enhance nutrition programs for older adults in Berks County.</p>	<p>Measures:</p> <p>a. Develop promotional efforts to create community awareness of the Farmers Market Nutrition Program.</p> <p>b. Supplement the Farmers Market Nutrition Program with additional produce vouchers for Farmers Market programs.</p> <p>c. Provide fresh produce supplement for Home Delivered Meals recipients.</p> <p>d. Reduce the waiting list for the Senior Food Box program in Berks County.</p> <p>e. Number of older adults that receive emergency food boxes from internal program.</p>	<p>a. FY 2024/25 through FY 2027/28</p> <p>b. FY 2024/25 and as budget allows subsequent years thorough 2027/28.</p> <p>c. FY 2024/25 and as budget allows in subsequent years thorough 2027/28.</p> <p>d. FY 2024/25 and as budget allows subsequent years thorough 2027/28.</p>

Goal 2: We will develop steps to overcome barriers that prevent older adults from staying connected to their communities and promote opportunities to engage with their communities how they choose.

Objective 2.1: Increase staff awareness of loneliness and social isolation for older adults.

Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Utilize screening tools for suicide risk & social isolation for staff and community partners.	a. Develop a process for staff trainings. b. Train all Care Management, Protective Services and Senior Center staff regarding risks and implement the utilization of screening tool.	Begin plan process and training July 2024. Full implementation to be completed by July 2025.
2. Implementation of PDA's Healthy IDEAS program to promote social connections for older adults experiencing isolation.	a. Number of staff and providers trained. b. Number of older adults assessed.	Begin training April 2025 with full implementation by December 2026

Objective 2.2: Promote programming and resources available to older adults to encourage community engagement.

Strategies	Performance Measures	Target Date
1. Identify the awareness of virtual access and programming available to older adults.	a. Survey active care managed older adults. b. Development and implementation of plan.	Implementation to begin January 2025 with full implementation by June 2027
2. Improve resource information in Agency admission packets for case managed programs to increase awareness of: Senior Centers Exercise programs Evidence Based Programs / Health and Wellness Assistive Technology County Tax Deferral Program	a. New packet format to be developed and dissemination to begin.	July 2024
3. Evaluate and improve upon information provided to all Senior Center participants. Include information regarding: Exercise Programs Evidence Based health and Wellness Programs Immunization information Health risks related to social isolation Assistive Technology Medication safety opioid education County Tax Deferral Program	a. Evaluation and plan development regarding dissemination of information and routine educational information.	To begin October 2024 with full implementation to be completed by September 2025

Objective 2.3: Post-COVID reconnection to health care needs for older adults.

Strategies	Performance Measures	Target Date
1. Develop a plan to create partnerships with local health care providers (i.e.: hospitals, clinics, direct care providers) to focus on the reduction of health care barriers for older adults and the promotion of immunizations.	a. Plan to be developed and implemented.	Plan to be developed by January 2025 with full implemented by July 2026

2. Partner with Berks County’s Council on Chemical Abuse and the SOS Berks Opioid Coalition to create awareness of medication safety, the increased risk for older adults, and opioid overdoses.	a. Train Agency staff on the use and purpose of naloxone kits and assist in their distribution. b. Measures: Number of trainings offered to staff and the community. Number of kits distributed.	Planning and implementation to begin July 2024
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Goal 3: We will support and engage in opportunities that offer equitable, affordable, and available options and opportunities that older adults may choose from for healthy and engaged lives, regardless of ability; socioeconomic status; racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds; or geographical location.

Objective 3.1: Improve access and availability of services among vulnerable and underserved populations and promote cultural and language accessibility.

Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Provide and identify training for Agency staff on cultural awareness and competency strategies to increase their skillset for servicing diverse and underserved populations.	Measures: a. 80% of Agency care management staff will be SAGECare credentialed meeting Platinum level. b. Training to be completed by Home Delivered Meals care managers and senior center staff.	Training will start July 2025. Full implementation is dependent upon PA Department of Aging role out of training. This will be completed within 9 months of availability.
2. Support cultural experiences, promote innovations, and expand programming in the community to attract new consumers and provide more opportunities for social engagement from diverse and underserved population.	a. Provide surveys to LGBTQ and Jewish centers, Keystone Deaf and Hard of Hearing, The Blind Association to identify how we can better serve these populations. b. Sponsorship of promotion of programming/events for diverse and underserved populations.	a-b. To begin January 2026 and continue to be budgeted
3. Create and distribute information that is accessible for outreach and communication, including parameters for multiple languages, accessible formats, print and digital media, and dissemination channels to ensure cultural and linguistic competency and incorporation of best practices to reach all older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers.	a. Target areas in county that have larger Latino population for outreach and promotional purposes. b. Target media outlets for advertising that serve the Latino population in Berks County (i.e.: radio commercials and magazines). c. Promote programming and services with local LGBTQ chapter.	a-c. To begin January 2025 and continue to be budgeted

Goal 4: We will promote Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to ensure older adults can live where and how they choose.

Objective 4.1: Expand our support to older adults for access to HCBS.		
Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Conduct targeted education to community partners and providers, providing tools needed to make referrals.	a. Number of trainings b. Tool development	January 2026
2. Develop a plan to improve internal Agency processes and protocols for assisting individuals attempting to access HCBS and supports.	a. Development of internal protocol for follow-up.	January 2026
Objective 4.2: Reduce barriers to enable seniors to remain in their home.		
Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Advocate with community organizations and legislators to address housing needs for seniors in Berks County.	Routine communications with Berks County legislators. Measure: a. Quarterly newsletters b. Annually invite legislators to 1:1 meeting	July 2024 and ongoing thereafter
2. Maintain partnership with the Berks County Tax Claim office to aid seniors in applying for the tax deferral program.	a. Number of individuals assisted with the tax deferral program. b. Development of an informational guide on tax deferral with the Tax Office.	July 2024 and ongoing thereafter
3. Meet with the local transportation authority (BARTA) to discuss geographic and financial shared ride service barriers.	a. Plan development to assess the barriers.	Begin process and develop a plan by July 2026
4. Engage OPTIONS providers and develop a plan to meet the needs of rural HCBS recipients.	a. Complete provider survey to identify barriers. b. Develop a process with providers and care management staff to address underserved areas in Berks County.	Meetings and plan process to begin January 2025.
Objective 4.3: Utilizing long-term care Ombudsman Program for individuals receiving HCBS.		
Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Educate Care Management staff regarding the parameters of the Ombudsman program and appropriate referrals to assist individuals that are having issue with HCBS.	a. Staff training	September 2024
2. Educate Ombudsmen regarding proper advocacy for consumers receiving HCBS.	a. Staff training	July 2024

Goal 5: We will support, educate, and inform family caregivers to ensure more sustainable, competent, and appropriate care to older adults.

Objective 5.1: Expand awareness, outreach, education, and access to programs, services, and products to optimize the physical, emotional, and financial well-being of family members.

Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Improve family caregivers’ access to information and referral while focusing on diverse and underserved populations.	a. Annual education for agency staff. b. Ensure all materials are offered in Spanish. c. Distribute caregiving tools (i.e.: AARP caregiver tool) upon admission to the Caregiver Support Program (CSP) program and annually.	a. July 2024 b.–c. January 2025
2. Provide training to family caregivers on caregiving basics, safe handling techniques, dementia and other related conditions, legal issues, and general aging services.	a. Development and implement an annual caregiver event that targets CSP recipients and other community caregivers.	July 2026
3. Improve access to technology to support caregiving.	a. Assist in getting low & reduced and cell phones & Wi-Fi service. b. Broaden Personal Emergency Response Systems and assistive technology devices offered through OPTIONS and CSP programs.	July 2025

Objective 5.2: Recognize, include, and support family caregivers as key partners in the provision of health care and long-term services and supports.

Strategies	Performance Measure	Target Date
1. Agency staff training to recognize and value the role and needs of family caregivers by utilizing empathic listening and assisting with real life problem solving when interacting with family caregivers.	a. Annual education for agency staff. b. Distribute caregiving tools (i.e.: AARP caregiver tool) upon admission to CSP program and annually.	September 2025
2. Develop and implement an outreach plan to educate the public and community partners about family caregiver needs and processes for referral.	a. Development & distribute of materials. b. Development and implementation of educational training sessions.	December 2026

Appendix 1: Assurances

AREA PLAN PART B

Section 1. Signature Page/Standard Assurances Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Aging

FY 2024-2028 Area Agency on Aging

Four-Year Area Plan on Aging

Signature Page Area Agency on Aging Name and Address:

Berks County Area Agency on Aging
County Services Center, 8 th Floor
633 Court Street
Reading, PA 19601

I/we certify that I/we are authorized to submit this Plan on behalf of the designated Area Agency on Aging and agree to abide by regulations issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor. I/we further certify that the general public has had the opportunity to review and comment on this Plan through the public hearing process and that written policies, procedures or agreements, as appropriate, have been developed in accordance with Part A, Section 307 of the Older Americans Act, and are on file for review and approval, as appropriate, by Department of Aging officials.

I/we assure that services and programs of the Area Agency on Aging will be managed and delivered in accordance with the Plan submitted herewith. Any substantial changes to the Plan will be submitted to the Department of Aging for prior approval.

I/we hereby expressly, as a condition precedent to the receipt of State and Federal funds, assure:

That in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990; The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act of 1955, as amended; and 16 PA Code, Chapter 49 (Contract Compliance regulations):

- 1) I/we do not and will not discriminate against any person because of race, color, religious creed, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, or handicap:
 - a) In providing services or employment, or in its relationship with other providers;
 - b) In providing access to services and employment for handicapped individuals.

2) I/we will comply with all regulations promulgated to enforce the statutory provisions against discrimination.

I/we further hereby agree that all contracts for the provision of services addressed herein will require contractors to comply with these same provisions.

I/we certify that the advisory council of the Area Agency on Aging has participated in the development of this Plan and has reviewed the Plan as herewith submitted.

Signature(s) of Governing Authority
Official(s), e.g., Chairman of County
Commissioners or President, Board of Directors.

	Title	Date
 _____ Christian Y. Leinbach	_____ Commissioner, Chair	<u>4/4/24</u>
 _____ Michael S. Rivera	_____ Commissioner, Vice Chair	<u>4/4/24</u>
 _____ Dante Santoni Jr.	_____ Commissioner	<u>4/4/24</u>
 _____ Carmen Torres	_____ Chief Clerk	<u>4/4/24</u>
 _____ Jessica Jones	_____ Director	<u>4/4/24</u>

Name of Person to Contact Regarding the Contents of This Plan:

Jessica Jones
(Name)

610-478-6500
(Area Code and Telephone)

Part B. Section 2

**DOCUMENTATION OF PARTICIPATION BY THE AREA
AGENCY ON AGING ADVISORY COUNCIL**

PSA NO. 32

NAME OF AAA: Berks County

PLAN PERIOD FROM 2024 TO 2028

In accordance with 6 PA Code, Section 35.23, a.(1) and (2) and the Older Americans Act of 1965, as amended, I certify that the Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council has had the opportunity to assist in the development of this Plan. I further certify that the Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council has participated in at least one Public Hearing held on this Plan.

The Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council (does) does not) not recommend approval of this Plan.



Linda Groff, Chair
Agency on Aging Advisory Council

Linda Groff, Chair

Typed Name and Title

3/22/24

Date

Part B. Section 3

Listing of Plan Assurances and Required Activities

Older Americans Act, As Amended in 2016

ASSURANCES

The Older Americans Act of 1965, as amended, requires each Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to provide assurances that it will develop a Plan and carry out a program in accordance with the Plan. Each AAA must comply with the following provisions of the Act. Written policies, procedures, or agreements, as appropriate, must be on file in the AAA office and available for review and approval by Department of Aging officials.

Area Plans

- Assurances that an adequate proportion, as required under section 307(a)(2), of the amount allotted for part B to the planning and service area will be expended for the delivery of each of the following categories of services:
 - Services associated with access to services (transportation, health services (including mental and behavioral health services), outreach, information and assistance (which may include information and assistance to consumers on availability of services under part B and how to receive benefits under and participate in publicly supported programs for which the consumer may be eligible) and case management services
 - In-home services, including supportive services for families of older individuals who are victims of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders with neurological and organic brain dysfunction
 - Legal assistance
- Assurances that the AAA will report annually to the State agency in detail the amount of funds expended for each such category during the fiscal year most recently concluded
- Assurances that the AAA will:
 - Set specific objectives, consistent with State policy, for providing services to older individuals with greatest economic need, older individuals with greatest social need, and older individuals at risk for institutional placement
 - Include specific objectives for providing services to low-income minority older individuals, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas; and
 - Include proposed methods to achieve the objectives
- Assurances that the AAA will include in each agreement made with a provider of any service under this title, a requirement that such provider will:
 - Specify how the provider intends to satisfy the service needs of low-income minority individuals, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas in the area served by the provider
 - To the maximum extent feasible, provide services to low-income minority individuals, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas in accordance with their need for such services

- Meet specific objectives established by the AAA, for providing services to low-income minority individuals, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas within the planning and service area
- Each AAA shall identify the number of low-income minority older individuals and older individuals residing in rural areas in the planning and service area, describe the methods used to satisfy the service needs of such minority older individuals, and provide information on the extent to which the AAA met the objectives described in clause (a)(4)(A)(i).
- Assurances that the AAA will use outreach efforts that will identify individuals eligible for assistance under this Act, with special emphasis on:
 - Older individuals residing in rural areas
 - Older individuals with greatest economic need (with particular attention to low-income minority individuals and older individuals residing in rural areas)
 - Older individuals with greatest social need (with particular attention to low-income minority individuals and older individuals residing in rural areas)
 - Older individuals with severe disabilities
 - Older individuals with limited English proficiency;
 - Older individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders with neurological and organic brain dysfunction (and the caretakers of such individuals)
 - Older individuals at risk for institutional placement
- Assurance that the AAA will ensure that each activity undertaken by the agency, including planning, advocacy, and systems development, will include a focus on the needs of low-income minority older individuals and older individuals residing in rural areas.
- Assurances that the AAA will coordinate planning, identification, assessment of needs, and provision of services for older individuals with disabilities, with particular attention to individuals with severe disabilities, and individuals at risk for institutional placement, with agencies that develop or provide services for individuals with disabilities
- Assurances that the AAA, in carrying out the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman program under section 307(a)(9), will expend not less than the total amount of funds appropriated under this Act and expended by the agency in fiscal year 2000 in carrying out such a program under this title.
- Information and assurances concerning services to older individuals who are Native Americans (referred to in this paragraph as "older Native Americans"), including:
 - Information concerning whether there is a significant population of older Native Americans in the planning and service area and if so, an assurance that the AAA will pursue activities
 - Outreach, to increase access of those older Native Americans to programs and benefits provided under this title
 - Assurance that the AAA will, to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate the services the agency provides under this title with services provided under title VI
 - Assurance that the AAA will make services under the area plan available, to the same extent as such services are available to older individuals within the planning and service area, to older Native Americans.
- Assurances that the AAA will maintain the integrity and public purpose of services provided, and service providers, under this title in all contractual and commercial relationships.

- Assurances that the AAA will disclose to the Assistant Secretary and the State agency the identity of each nongovernmental entity with which such agency has a contract or commercial relationship relating to providing any service to older individuals; and the nature of such contract or such relationship.
- Assurances that the AAA will demonstrate that a loss or diminution in the quantity or quality of the services provided, or to be provided, under this title by such agency has not resulted and will not result from such contract or such relationship.
- Assurances that the AAA will demonstrate that the quantity or quality of the services to be provided under this title by such agency will be enhanced as a result of such contract or such relationship.
- Assurances that the area agency will, on the request of the Assistant Secretary or the State, for the purpose of monitoring compliance with this Act (including conducting an audit), disclose all sources and expenditures of funds such agency receives or expends to provide services to older individuals.
- Assurances that preference in receiving services under this title will not be given by the AAA to particular older individuals as a result of a contract or commercial relationship that is not carried out to implement this title.
- Assurances that funds received under this title will be used to provide benefits and services to older individuals, giving priority to older individuals identified in paragraph (4)(A)(i); and in compliance with the assurances specified in paragraph (13) and the limitations specified in section 212.

Appendix 2: Data Source Citations

AAA Listening Session Data (provided by PDA)

ACL.GOV

<https://acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/raise-family-caregiving-advisory-council>

<https://acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/national-family-caregiver-support-program>

Aging in America www.ioaging.org/aging-in-america

Aging in the United States www.prb.org/resources/fact-sheet-aging-in-the-united-states

NASHP.ORG

<https://nashp.org/analysis-of-public-comments-on-the-national-strategy-to-support-family-caregivers/>

Pennsylvania Department of Health

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/HealthStatistics/VitalStatistics/CountyHealthProfiles/Documents/current/berks.aspx>

Pennsylvania State Data Center <https://pasdc.hbg.psu.edu/Data/PaSDC-Dashboards>

United States Census Bureau

https://data.census.gov/profile/Berks_County,_Pennsylvania?g=050XX00US42011

USA Facts <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/population-and-demographics/our-changing-population/state/pennsylvania/county/berks-county/>

RESOLUTION NO. 112-2024


BE IT RESOLVED AND IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that the Berks County Board of Commissioners hereby authorizes the approval and execution of the Berks County Area Agency on Aging 2024-2028 Local Area Plan effective October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2028.

ADOPTED THIS 4TH DAY OF APRIL 2024.

COUNTY OF BERKS, PENNSYLVANIA


Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair

Attest:


Michael S. Rivera, Commissioner


Carmen Torres, Chief Clerk


Dante Santoni, Jr., Commissioner