

2015 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE on AGING

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Celebrating Diversity Among Older Americans

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Over the past year, I've traveled all over America to hear from older Americans, caregivers, advocates, researchers, and local leaders engaged in broadening options for older Americans. As we prepare for the White House Conference on Aging, the dialogue we've had in cities across the country has involved ensuring that we have diverse voices as part of the conversation.

Over the past 50 years, older populations in our country have seen dramatic change. Giant strides have been made to ensure equal access and treatment for all older adults. However, work remains. Older adults from communities of color and the LGBT community are disproportionately low income and have poorer health throughout their lifetimes. We must ensure that services for older adults in these communities are culturally responsive to their needs.

While in Seattle, on a visit with Asian older adults at the Asian Counseling and Referral Services, elders shared how having the opportunity to connect with others who share their culture and language improves their overall health and sense of purpose. Participants relished the opportunity to take dance and exercise classes and share meals unique to their cultures.



Recently, in Los Angeles, I attended a town hall session hosted by the Diverse Elders Coalition, a national coalition representing LGBT, AAPI, Hispanic, American Indian, and Black elders. I was inspired by their stories and resilience. An older African-American gay man talked about the needs of older adults living with HIV. 2015 marks the first time in the AIDS epidemic's history that one in two people with HIV in the U.S. will be age 50 and older. Others from the Hispanic, AAPI, and American Indian populations discussed the importance of language access, housing, and transportation services to ensuring healthy aging.