

Op-Ed: The next governor has 1.6 million reasons to prioritize aging

When we strengthen systems for older adults, we strengthen systems for all of us

CATHY ROWE | OCTOBER 15, 2025 | [OPINION](#)



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New Jersey is at a turning point. Nearly 1.6 million of our residents are aged 65 and older, making us home to one of the oldest populations in the country. In less than 10 years, there will be more residents over the age of 60 than there will be students sitting in our state's classrooms. Yet, despite this demographic reality, aging has too often been treated as a side issue, or a concern for social services or health care providers.

As New Jersey elects its next governor, now is the time to reframe the way we think about aging.

Aging touches every aspect of life. Housing, taxes, transportation, storm preparedness, health, and economic policy all intersect with the lives of older adults. That's why New Jersey's next governor must prioritize aging not as a siloed issue, but as a guiding principle across all policy decisions.

When we strengthen systems for older adults, we strengthen systems for all of us. Research shows that every \$1 invested in healthy aging interventions [yields \\$3 in return](#). That's not just good policy, it's good economics. Supporting preventive health, home-based care and age-friendly community design saves taxpayer dollars in the long run, while improving quality of life for all residents.

While many older adults want to age in place, rising costs threaten their ability to do so. State programs like New Jersey's Senior Freeze, which benefits more than [125,000 senior and disabled homeowners](#), provide essential relief from property taxes. But relief alone isn't enough. Without systemic changes that address affordability, housing accessibility, and neighborhood design, too many older residents will find themselves unable to remain in the communities they helped build.

More than just dollars

But the urgent need to prioritize aging isn't only about economics . . . it's also about survival. As the frequency and severity of storms have increased in recent years, older New Jersey residents are facing [higher risks during disasters](#). Many towns and counties still lack adequate preparedness to safeguard older residents from severe weather events like hurricanes, heat waves and flooding. Preparing for disasters through better planning, stronger infrastructure and community support systems improves emergency response and saves lives.

Aging is not a partisan issue. We are all aging. The policies we design today will determine whether our parents, neighbors, and eventually ourselves will have the ability to thrive with dignity and security in the state we love. That's why we urge the next governor to embrace an "aging impact lens" for decision-making.

What does that lens do? It means not only looking at housing policy as affordability for young families but also creating accessible homes for seniors. It means transportation and infrastructure aren't just about reducing congestion but also about ensuring non-driving older adults can still reach doctors, groceries, and community life. It means health care policy that isn't just about cost containment but also about guaranteeing coverage for preventive services, home care, and long-term support – and proactively recruiting, training and retaining health care providers to meet increasing needs.

A change in thinking

That's why Lifelong Strong NJ – a coalition of advocates, thought leaders and service providers – is calling on the next governor to adopt a comprehensive "Multisector Plan for Aging," with measurable goals and real accountability. With strong leadership, New Jersey can strengthen affordability protections, prioritize age-friendly communities, and tackle the challenges that drive up the costs of housing and care – all while embedding aging considerations across every sector of public policy.

New Jersey's older residents are not just recipients of services. They are contributors, workers, caregivers and community anchors. They are veterans, taxpayers, mentors and volunteers. They are family. They are, in many ways, the backbone of our state.

As we stand at this moment of change, the next governor has a choice: treat aging as an afterthought or recognize it as a defining challenge — and opportunity — of our time.

With nearly 1.6 million older residents calling New Jersey home, the question isn't whether to act; it's how boldly we can lead. We have 1.6 million reasons to make it a priority.

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