



# Onondaga County Legislature

**JAMIE McNAMARA**  
Clerk

**JAMES J. ROWLEY**  
Chairman

**TAMMY BARBER**  
Deputy Clerk

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## **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 11, 2023** **COLLEEN A. GUNNIP, CHAIR**

**MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Chase, Ms. Kuhn, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Bush**

**ALSO ATTENDING: Mrs. Ervin; also see attached**

Chair Gunnip called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. *The minutes of the previous meeting had been distributed, and there were no objections to waiving the reading. There were no corrections to the minutes, and the minutes were approved.*

### **1. VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY: Anne-Marie-Mancilla, Executive Director** **a. INFORMATIONAL: 2023 Update**

*The mission of OCVSA is to assist veterans, military personnel, and their families apply for local, state or federal benefits they may be eligible for. To provide information, assistance and advocacy for claimants in actions or claims against the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or state and local veterans-related entitlements to include burial assistance.*

***Our mission has been directly impacted by the Pandemic and recently passed laws that directly affect VA Benefits.***

*The Pandemic added delay to an already flawed VA claims processing system.*

*Recent passing of The PACT Act (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins), which expands eligibility for veterans exposed to harmful toxins while in service, has generated an increase in inquiries. In December 2021, The VSA implemented a new records management system to help accurately track claims and benefits received. In 2022 we had 2205 Interactions regarding VA claims and assisted with 277 burials. In 2023 we already have 2923 Interactions and 152 burials. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has increased their workforce by 15% in the benefits department and have received 30% more claims since the passing of the PACT Act.*

- An interaction is what turns into a claim

*In addition to national changes, local changes are also impacting our mission. Historically, when veterans and/or their dependents applied for Social Services, the claimant was required to apply for any VA benefits they may be eligible for. This regulation was lifted due to COVID and was re-instated effective July 2023. To date we have received roughly 100 referrals from OC-DSS initiating claims, or a claims review.*

*There are a limited number of accredited Veteran Service Officers in our area. To legally assist a client with a VA claim, you need to be accredited by the VA. The VSA has absorbed the workload of several offices that have closed or stopped processing claims in the area. There is an immediate need for VSO's.*

### **Questions/Comments from the committee:**

- If somebody applies for Medicaid and are eligible for VA services, they cannot get Medicaid, so do they have to take VA medical services?
  - 8 different tiers of health care eligibility for the VA
  - It is on an individual basis where Medicare and Medicaid cross over
    - Depends on if person is eligible for pension, service connection, which tier they are in

- If they were receiving VA health care all along and no service connection, then yes
- Government will not pay twice for healthcare; would be out of VA health care system at 65 to receive Medicare
- When eligible for benefits for service connection or pension, it allows them to stay in VA healthcare
- How many people are effected by that?
  - Large majority; a lot are not looking into benefits until it is needed (i.e. WWII, Korea, Vietnam)
  - Most DSS referrals received are applying for Medicaid because of assisted living or nursing home bills
  - Initiates first look into VA benefits; each case has to be reviewed
- A lot of people in the past went to VA, but had options for other healthcare, and now they are told they are not eligible
  - Comes down to finances
    - Early 90's there was open eligibility - allowing anyone to come for VA healthcare who served 2 yrs active duty
  - At the time, no finance issues, because they had money to treat everyone
  - As people do not apply for benefits, VSA will not continue to get refunded
  - If they had more people to apply for benefits
  - To provide for those who are service connected (on a higher tier and grandfathered in) - have Medicare for an option
  - People treated by same doctor for 30 years, who now have to figure it out
  - Flawed system and very broken system
- What can be done?
  - Encourage people to apply for benefits is going to show the need for funding
  - Attitude of saying “lets save it for the next person” is not working in the VA's favor
  - Pots of money sitting there not being tapped into; Congress saying either use it or take it away
  - Outreach is important
  - Benefits help with health care

***The VSA continues to assist with Veteran and Spouse Burials in The Onondaga County Veterans Memorial Cemetery.***

***Local Law 01-2019 Impact-***Waiving the Burial Fee for Veterans and their dependents directly lead to a 71% increase in pre-need burial applications through 2021. To date, we have reimbursed the community roughly \$596,000. This initiative was extended due to the Pandemic and will have a hard stop date of 12/31/2022.

***Indigent Burials-***Processing of Indigent Burials have been transferred to OC-DSS effective March 2023. All funeral homes in The Funeral Home Association were notified via e-mail and/or a letter.

**Questions/Comments from the committee:**

- DSS was already doing indigent burials for those that were not veterans, correct?
  - Yes, for all residents that are not veterans
  - VSA handles all veterans and spouses – spouse of a veteran is a county resident
  - Best handled by DSS and more cost effective
  - VSA still assists with eligibility and DB-214 to ensure burial on veterans side where spouse is buried; spouse or dependent will be buried with veteran, as long as they are buried there

***Burial Application Support***

- *VSA provides applications and assistance for burial in OCVMC as well as support with completing and submitting 21P-530's Burial Allowance Application, when applicable. In 2022, we have assisted with 277 applications for burial in OCVMC.*
- *VSA works closely with the Parks department to identify unmarked gravesites and provide proper VA Markers that were not addressed at the time of burial. Approximately 65 sites have been properly marked in the last three years and this is an on-going effort.*

**Questions/Comments from the committee:**

- With regards to burial, has there been any progress made with scheduling and limited availability?
  - Understand inconvenience of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, but most effective with maintaining grounds
  - Insures proper respectful burials without families/funeral parlors having to wait and/or be left behind
  - Not many people complaining; no weekends right now, but might change in the future
  - Is there more of a delay for Funeral Homes with families?
- No alternative for times and dates; sometimes have to wait until the next week
  - Will be an ongoing conversation to see what will work
  - If there was additional Park's staff, they could return to the way it was
  - Current staff had backup, so cutting back made it more organized
  - Have a good relationship and communication with Parks Department

***Community Partners remain a vital part of our mission***

- *Clear Path-Every Wednesday, peer support/CPV-SYR office used for office hours.*
- *The Vet Center-Office hours on Fridays*
- *VA Hospital-Open discussions when assisting veterans*
- *VFW and American Legions*
- *Local National Guard/Reserve Units*
- *Local municipalities, including the City of Syracuse, regarding Veteran Outreach Coordinators*
- *Syracuse University Veterans Legal Clinic, Syracuse Serves*
- *NYS Division of Veterans Services*
- *ESGR (Employers Support Guard and Reserve) - Director presented with Patriotic Employer Award*
- *CNY-Heroes with Dan Cummings*

***Outreach***

*VSA staff have tabled many outreach events to include job fairs and resource fairs. We are available to meet with veterans in multiple locations. VSO's have work cell phones so we can be reached when away from the office physically.*

- Claims process average is 9 months

***Personnel and Daily Activities***

*We currently have seven full-time positions: one Director, one Assistant Director, two full-time Veteran Service Officers, one Information Aide, one Clerk I (vacant) and one Administrative Intern. The Clerk I position recently became vacant and we are in the process of filling it. The Director and Assistant Director are both accredited Veteran Service Officers and process claims. All service officers maintain at least two accreditations to best serve our veterans.*

*We have reviewed our contracts with Clear Path for Veterans and Syracuse University Veterans Law Clinic. Both agencies are a large presence in our community and support our outreach efforts.*

*The VSA coordinated the Memorial Day Ceremony in May 2023 and is assisting with coordination of the Veteran Expo and Parade on 11/4 at The Fairgrounds and the Veterans Day Ceremony on 11/11 at The Onondaga County War Memorial.*

*Staff of the VSA are involved with several veteran and advocacy groups on the local, state and national level. Staff attend the Onondaga County VSAB and The War Memorial and Cemetery Sub-Committee meetings. The Director sits on Senator Gillibrand's Service Academy Selection Board and the Assistant Director is a member of the federal advocacy group Military Family Advocacy Network (MFAN).*

*We have developed and maintained strong working relationships with our county and community partners to best serve our veteran and military community.*

### **Questions/Comments from the committee:**

- How is VSA doing with the SHAPE-UP Program?
  - A lot of people in need of home repairs; eligibility for the program is not meeting the needs
  - There are people who's roofs are caving in living on social security exclusively; not in position to talk to bank or get the paperwork needed
  - Lot of red tape to go through
  - Veterans have been denied because they are income based
  - It is not fitting the needs of people
  
- What can be done to fit the need?
  - Right now it is similar to Syracuse Home Headquarters
  - People calling who've already applied for HH and ask what the difference is with this program
  - Cannot see a difference, and cannot see where there is an advantage for a veteran or spouse to apply for the benefit
  
- 2 issues: (1) Person in need the most not reaching out to VSA and (2) paperwork is tedious; not enough time to help with Veterans Coordinators
- Part of process, is the person has to have lien against house for 5 years, so some are hesitant
- If the person would sell (in 5 years), they would get more money for it after fixing it up and could pay the lien off
  - VSA does get calls for home improvements; if mods are needed for home, they assume VA would cover, but that is not the case; VA would provide a wheelchair, but not the ramp
  
- Is VSA doing SHAPE-UP Applications?
- Community Development numbers as of June 7<sup>th</sup>: 56 inquires with 23 approved and \$336,000 budgeted
- About 1/3 way there since beginning of June
- Information was from an email sent out from Mr. Skahen in Community Development (CD)
- CD did Facebook post about money available for SHAPE-UP for Veterans
- Is Community Development the ones tweaking the program?
  - VSA:
    - Believe so, as it is in that department
  - Law:
    - Criteria on website
    - Tied to STAR
    - 62 years old or older, owner occupied property for at least 1 year
    - Live in Onondaga County outside the city
    - Property taxes have to be current
    - Covered by homeowners insurance
    - Income threshold of \$75,000 for family of 4
  - VSA:
    - Outside the city is limiting with city residents
    - Not sure if this crosses over with Home Headquarters (possibly redundancy)
  
- Would applicant have to be able to apply to a bank?
  - Do not believe for this particular benefit, but for some things, yes
  
- The lien could be discarded, as it could be an impediment for people
  - People reaching out have strict income and do not want to lose everything they have worked for
  - Doing great job in Community Development with guiding
  - No one will say the person will get something without paperwork
  
- Could let CD know that the lien question is a concern for people
  - VSA:
    - Yes, Mr. Skahen is the head of this, so they should sit down with him to discuss

- Referrals are coming in from somewhere else
- See how VSA can incorporate what they are seeing
- CD has hit a good demographic that is working, but there are some that are really destitute
- Law:
  - As far as the lien, it is the idea of a person getting \$8,000, then they turn around to sell the home for the extra \$8,000 and pocket the extra money, which is county taxpayer dollars
  - It is about living in the home and investing in the home
  - 5 years might be long, but that was the idea; otherwise people could sell the next day with a new roof
- Does the VSA see ending 2023 financially well? Is there anything extra they are asking for in 2024?
  - Yes, and not prepared to answer about 2024; it is all in the budget
- Compliments to Ms. Mancilla, Ms. Meili and staff for the direction they have taken at VSA
- *Suggestion:* Additional Veterans Service Agent
- Those representing outlining areas of the county feel the need for personal and physical outreach to people's front porch
  - Agreed; main goal is to meet the veterans where they are; they will not all come to Civic Center or Clearpath
  - Combat Veterans Anonymous invited VSA to speak at their group (meeting once a month)
  - Different pockets of people who are hearing the information will generate claims
  - Other VSA's in other counties have absent director positions, so Onondaga County's VSA has been absorbing the work, because some of the other offices only have 1 or 2 people

## 2. **ADULT & LONG TERM CARE:** JoAnne Spoto Decker, Commissioner

### a. **INFORMATIONAL: 2023 Update**

*(See attached PowerPoint presentation)*

#### **Questions/Comments from the committee:**

- Has the \$1M been spoken for (senior center grant)?
  - Yes, 21 applicants
- Over \$1M, and there was additional funding in the ALTC budget to use, so every applicant received funding
  - Yes
- Is there a listing of all the applicants?
  - Yes
- Some have been awarded, where ALTC has gone out to award them; when did the letters go out?
  - Award letters went out a month ago
  - List of applicants is not on ALTC website, because it is a County Executive initiative
- Any significant changes that ALTC is asking for in the 2024 budget?
  - No

Dr. Kelly stated for the record, "Darcie wants me to report that we do in fact have that list."

*(List of applicants on file with the Clerk)*

***A motion was made by Dr. Kelly, seconded by Ms. Kuhn, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



DEBBIE KAMINSKI, Assistant Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature



# Health & Human Services Committee Presentation

JoAnne Spoto Decker, Commissioner  
Maria Mahar, Deputy Commissioner

[www.ongov.net/adult](http://www.ongov.net/adult)

**Sept. 11, 2023**





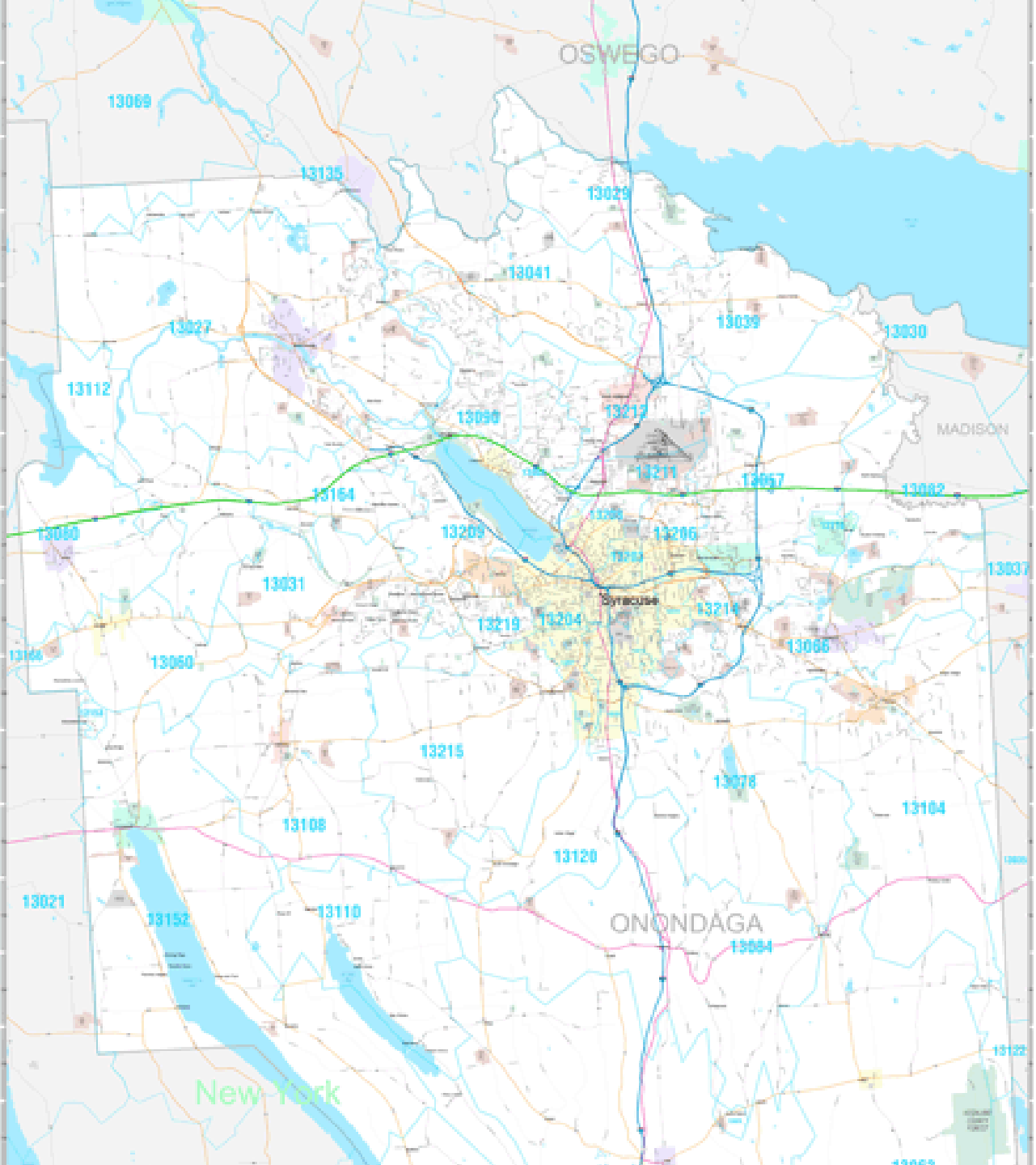
# What we do

The Department of Adult and Long Term Care Services connects individuals to directly provided services, outside organizations, service providers, and community groups to receive assistance for a variety of needs including:

- Health Insurance & Benefits
- Food, Meals, & Nutrition
- Homecare & Caregiver Assistance
- Safety, Wellness, & Socialization Programs
- Housing Care & Counseling
- Long-Term Care Needs
- Transportation
- Adult Protective Services

- Office for Aging
- NY Connects
- Adult Protective Services
- Long Term Care Resource Center





# Onondaga County

**Living in Onondaga:**

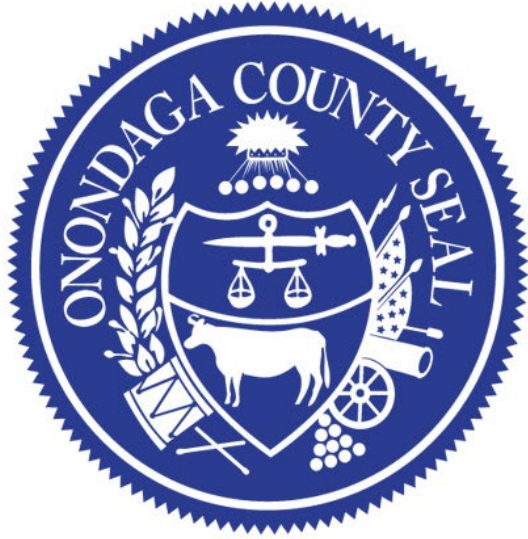
473,236 people

**Aged 60 and over: 122,195**

26% of Onondaga's County's  
Population

\*Data from US Census 2021 ACS 1-year  
Estimates subject chart





**Onondaga County  
Department of  
Adult and Long Term  
Care Services**

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**Office for Aging**



# Health Insurance Information, Counseling & Assistance

## HIICAP

Staying  
Steady

Jan – July 2022: 449 assisted

- 46% Low Income Adults

Jan – July 2023: 408 assisted

- 50% are Low Income Adults



# EISEP

## Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program



Clients up from 2022

30% ↑

- PERS (Personal Emergency Response System) Clients Served up 30%

56% ↑

- In-Home Care clients served up 56%, Hours of Care up 32%

12% ↑

- CDPAP (Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program) clients up 12%, and hours of care up 24%

136% ↑

- Social Adult Day Care clients up 136%



# Food, Meals, & Nutrition Assistance

## NUTRITION PROGRAM

Up from 2022

26% ↑

- Congregate Meals Served, up 26%

19% ↑

- Home Delivered Meals, up 19%

51% ↑

- Farmers' Market Coupons

- Dollar Value increase from \$48,000 to \$72,500, up 51%

114% ↑

- Coupons Issued from 1,353 to 2900, up 114%



# Caregiver Support & Education

## CAREGIVER SERVICES

Caregiver Assistance through:

- 10 Spring Semester Classes & Courses
- 9 Caregiver Events
- 4 Discussion & Support Groups/month
- Ongoing Caregiver Support Program
- Animatronic Pet Program



# Community Services Programs

## HEAP

**Staying  
Steady**

Contacts

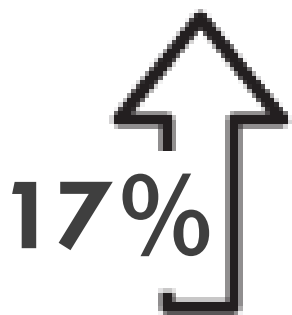
Total 2022: 2500

Jan-Jul 2023: 1600



# Community Services Programs

## Transportation Services



Rides Provided

Jan-Jul 2022: 12,379

Jan-Jul 2023: 14,434

**Rides up from 2022**



# Community Services Programs

## TymeSavers

## Shopping Services

Units of Shopping Services

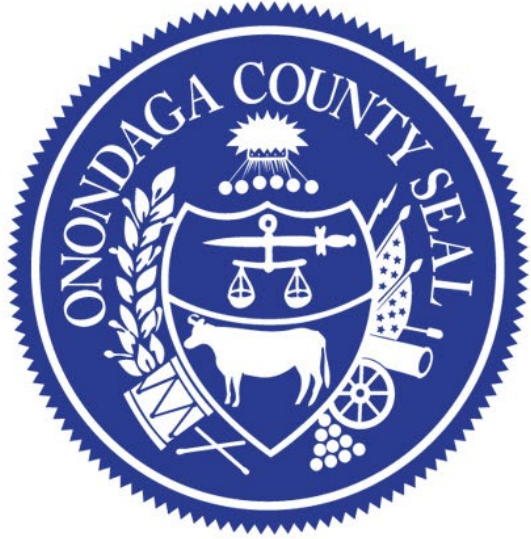
Jan-July 2022: 907

Jan-July 2023: 891

**Staying  
Steady**







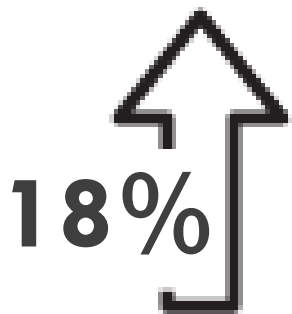
# Onondaga County Department of Adult and Long Term Care Services

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# NY Connects



# NY CONNECTS

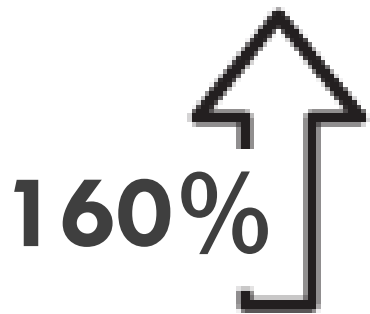


## Contacts

Jan-Jul 2022: 1453

Jan-Jul 2023: 1709

**Contacts up from 2022**



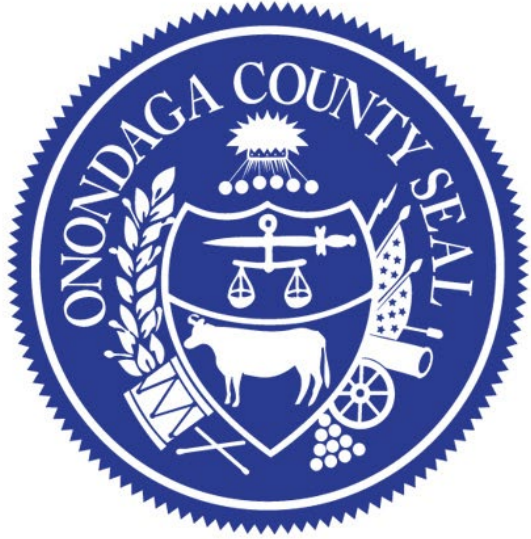
## Caregivers

Jan-Jul 2022: 160

Jan-Jul 2023: 416

**Contacts up from 2022**





**Onondaga County  
Department of  
Adult and Long Term  
Care Services**

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# **Adult Protective Services**

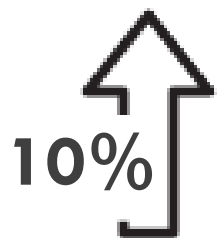


# APS

## ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The total Referrals

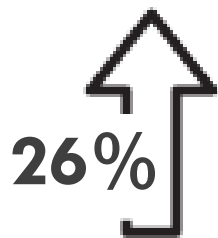
- Jan-Jul 2022: 928
- Jan-Jul 2023: 1017



**up from 2022**

The total Moved to Assessment

- Jan-Jul 2022: 355
- Jan-Jul 2023: 482




**up from 2022**



# APS GUARDIANSHIPS

The total Guardianship cases

- Jan-Jul 2022: 39
- Jan-Jul 2023: 85

118%  


We are on track to exceed 2022 total by 118% by the end of 2023.

**Guardianships up from 2022**



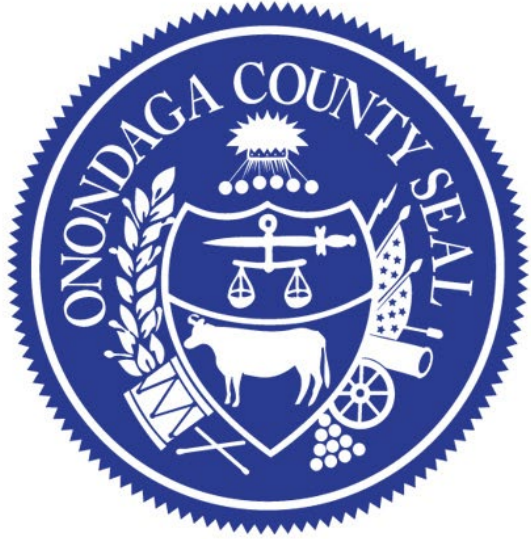
# APS

## COVID-19 & AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Provided:

- Emergency housing
- Prevent evictions
- Provide security deposits & first month rent
- Provide hoarding cleanouts
- Visiting home-aids
- Other services such as food, clothing, transportation and furniture





**Onondaga County  
Department of  
Adult and Long Term  
Care Services**

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**Adult and Long Term  
Resource Center**

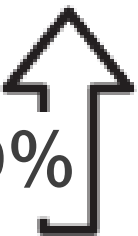


# Long Term Care Resource Center

## LONG TERM CARE

The total # of PRI & Screens completed

- 2022 Total: 107
- Jan-Jul 2023: 85

20% 

We are on track to exceed 2022 total by 20% by the end of 2023.





# Outreach & Special Events

## 2022-2023

- 75 events, reaching with over 3,000 community members about ALTCS programs and services
- Senior Citizen of the Year 2023
- 4 Senior Farmers' Market Luncheons
- Elder Abuse Conference 2023 Sponsorship
- “Healthy Aging: Services for Older Adults You May Not Know About” presented August 2023  
Healthlink/OASIS partnership



# Highlights

## Grants

### Transportation Grant | NY DOT 5310

**Goal:** Assist transportation providers with the necessary funding to deal with the uptick of requests and high gas prices.

Awarded: \$390,000

### SHINE Program

#### Seniors' Health Improvement & Nutrition Education Program

**Goal:** Increase the number of low-income older adults who receive nutrition education to promote healthier lifestyles.

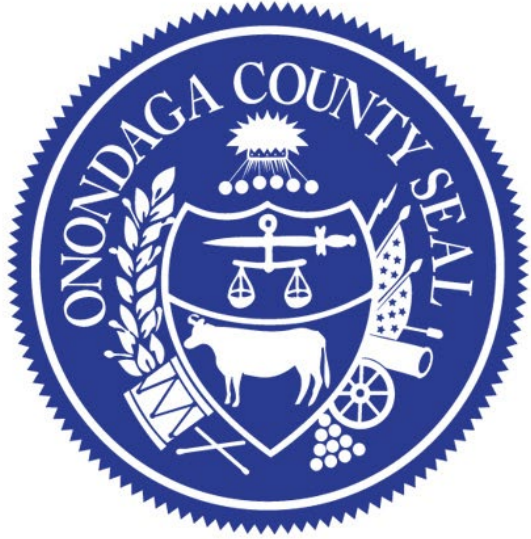
### Senior Center Funding Grant 2023

**Goal:** Provide Onondaga County Senior Centers financial assistance for capital improvements and other projects.



Canton Woods, Baldwinsville





**Onondaga County  
Department of  
Adult and Long Term  
Care Services**

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**Thank you for your continued support  
for ALTCS programs, services and staff.**



## ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: HEALTH &amp; HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

DATE: SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Maria Mahar	OCALICS
Amanda Roberts	"
JoAnne Spoto Decker	"
Cindy Menti	USA
Amie Mancilla	USA
JoAnne Spoto Decker	ALICS
Daniel Romeo	
Darcie Lesniak	Leg
Ben Yaus	LAW
John DeSantis	Leg
Tim Berbe	Leg