

## Group intends to refine ways of helping out Utah's seniors

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The help may be out there, but finding services and resources available to older Utahns and their family members can be difficult.

It won't be that way in the future, if the Utah Commission on Aging succeeds. On Thursday, the commission laid out a preliminary analysis of the state's infrastructure for aging Utahns. It also identified the first steps it wants to take to ensure help and support are plentiful and easy to find for both individuals and professionals.

The commission is trying to get the state prepared for a coming "gray wave" as baby boomers approach age 65; it is estimated that in 25 years, the state's 65-plus population will more than double. Created by the Utah Legislature, the commission has a two-year assignment to help prepare the state for that demographic shift.

The commission has set up seven working groups focused on such topics as financial security, caregiver support and health care; most of the groups said existing help is hampered by a lack of coordination between service providers. Two early proposals for addressing that problem: establish a Web site that lists all services and resources for older Utahns and create an aging resource center. "There are a whole lot of us who work with seniors and none of us can find everything that is out there," said Maureen Henry, commission co-chair.

Among the more difficult challenges for the commission are shifting negative public perceptions of older people, helping employers see the value of and attract older workers, encouraging Utahns to adopt healthy habits so they age well and ensuring there is an adequate pool of geriatric health care workers. Several commission members said Utah has not kept up with the need for senior housing and that many existing care facilities are outdated; both areas worthy of study. If not addressed, the state could end up with a "huge senior underclass," said Bill Hunt, who is on the committee tackling quality of life in residential settings.

The state also needs to focus on needs of elderly people who are homeless and its aging prison population, commission members said.