

Success Stories

Building Collaborative Contracts With Health Care:

A Social Connection Partnership Between Senior Connection, Inc., and UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Massachusetts

Introduction

Since 2016, The John A. Hartford Foundation Business Innovation Award¹ has honored community-based organizations that partner with and contract with health care entities, such as health systems, health plans and accountable care organizations, to improve health outcomes and quality of life for older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers, and to replicate these successful partnerships nationwide. Award recipients are recognized for their bold, transformative initiatives that align health and social care and increase their organization's sustainability. The award is sponsored by The John A. Hartford Foundation and presented by USAging's Aging and Disability Business Institute and Engaged: USAging's Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults.

Senior Connection, Inc., a runner-up for The John A. Hartford Foundation 2025 Business Innovation Award, was recognized for its partnership with UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Massachusetts and its innovative Care Express Rural Aging Health Access program. Senior Connection, Inc., collaborated with UnitedHealthcare to create a mobile health outreach initiative to address the needs of older adults, especially those in remote rural communities. This Success Story highlights a pioneering mobile outreach approach that effectively serves older populations in rural areas in Central Massachusetts.

About the Partners

Senior Connection, Inc., a nonprofit Area Agency on Aging (AAA) based in Worcester, MA, connects individuals in Worcester and Middlesex Counties with the assistance they need to live independently at home for as long as possible. With a 50-year history,



This partnership meets people where they are by showing up in their communities with care, dignity and trust."

—Dr. Moses Dixon, President and CEO,
Senior Connection, Inc.

the organization offers mobile health services, case management, caregiver support, resource navigation and outreach tailored to different communities. The mission of Senior Connection, Inc., includes enhancing the quality of life for older adults and caregivers through leadership, resources, service coordination and advocacy. Collaborating with more than 60 local Councils on Aging (COAs) and senior centers, Senior Connection focuses on reducing disparities among low-income populations, people with limited English proficiency and those who are socially isolated.

UnitedHealthcare is the health benefits business of UnitedHealth Group, a nationwide health care and well-being company that also includes Optum, a business that delivers care aided by technology and data, providing guidance and tools needed to achieve better health. The **UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Massachusetts** is a health insurance program offering managed care plans designed for people with limited incomes and older adults who qualify for both MassHealth (Medicaid) and Medicare.²

About the Contract

In August 2024, Senior Connection, Inc., and UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Massachusetts partnered to improve health care access in rural Central Massachusetts, an area affected by the closures of local hospitals and clinics. To underscore the importance of this collaboration, Steward Health Care announced that month that it would close two major health care providers, Carney Hospital in Dorchester and Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer. The partnership launched the Care Express Mobile Health & Outreach bus (Care Express), which delivers essential services directly to older adults in hard-to-reach communities. UnitedHealthcare supports the initiative by providing funding, sharing real-time member data and offering coordination support.

The Care Express Rural Aging Health Access program is a pioneering, innovative mobile health outreach solution designed to meet the unique needs of older adults in rural communities, primarily through the Care Express platform. Recognizing the challenges posed by rural clinic closures and geographic isolation, this model delivers essential health services in an accessible and tailored way that reflects the needs and social context of the population it serves. Care Express visits town senior centers and COAs, where older adults already gather and feel supported. By bringing care directly to these familiar environments, the program eliminates the need for older adults to travel long distances or navigate complex health care systems. This approach ensures that individuals receive meaningful, effective care within their own communities.

The Care Express program combines the 4Ms framework of Age-Friendly Care³ with community outreach efforts. The model focuses on addressing:

- *What Matters:* Community health workers (CHWs) lead structured conversations about health priorities and care preferences.
- *Medication:* Basic medication review and referral systems are in place for follow-up with providers.
- *Mind (Mentation):* Onsite depression, dementia and cognitive screenings, with follow-up support.
- *Mobility:* Fall risk assessments and referrals to physical therapy, home safety programs and local services.



Care Express Mobile Health & Outreach bus (Care Express)

The Care Express program provides various services aimed at promoting the health and well-being of seniors, including:

- Health screenings tailored to community needs.
- Education on chronic disease prevention.
- Guidance on navigating social services.
- Assistance with benefits enrollment.

Services are provided by trained CHWs who come from the region's communities and speak their languages. Their presence helps build trust and understanding, which makes health interventions more accessible and effective. By focusing on a community-centered approach, the Care Express Rural Aging Health Access program ensures that older adults in Central Massachusetts, especially those in hard-to-reach areas, receive meaningful, effective care. This program overcomes barriers related to distance and complexity, enabling individuals to access health services in a supportive, familiar environment.

Impact and Outcomes

Through collaboration with more than 60 local aging organizations and senior centers, the Care Express Rural Aging Health Access program has reported an 87-percent increase in confidence in health care and a reduction in social isolation, fueled by ongoing community engagement. The key activities that improved participants' social connection and reduced

loneliness included regular community interactions; outreach by CHWs who reflect the communities they serve; attention to cognition, mobility and chronic conditions; early identification of health issues and links to primary care providers. These services were provided in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Haitian Creole, with outcomes monitored and coordinated through the UniteUs platform.

Since its launch in mid-2024, the Care Express program has served more than 260 older adults across more than a dozen rural towns. Measurable impacts include:

- Ninety-two percent of participants are now connected to a primary care provider.
- A 45-percent decrease in avoidable emergency room visits.
- More than 200 assessments addressing cognition, mobility and chronic conditions were completed.
- CHWs offered English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Haitian Creole to help meet the communication needs of older adults living in this region.

Care Express offers direct delivery of health, dental, vision and legal services to rural “medical care deserts”—regions with severely limited or no access to essential health services, including hospitals, clinics, primary care and specialized services such as maternity care.⁴ The program aims to go beyond medical needs by also addressing social connection and legal crisis intervention.



L: Dr. Nadeem Kasmani, MD, MMSc, Lecturer, Harvard Medical School. R: Dr. Moses Dixon, President and CEO, Senior Connection, Inc.

Lessons Learned

A key lesson was the importance of trusted community venues, like COAs, as entry points. Since many older adults in rural areas are hesitant to use new systems, engaging them in familiar, supportive environments was crucial. A major challenge was coordinating data exchange and scheduling with the health plan, but Senior Connection, Inc., addressed this by developing a shared data dashboard and conducting weekly coordination calls. Keeping trust at all service levels was vital for genuine engagement and successful results.

The Future

The partnership has enhanced Senior Connection’s reach and sustainability by aligning its services with managed care goals and demonstrating impact through shared data with UnitedHealthcare. Its success—which leverages mobility, deep community knowledge, and local partnerships with 60 COAs—has paved the way for statewide expansion. Additionally, the state of Massachusetts considers it a model for addressing rural health care gaps in two more regions. The Care Express Rural Aging Health Access program holds significant potential as a blueprint for national replication, providing a scalable approach that other states and organizations can adapt to improve access and reduce social isolation among older adults.

Endnotes

- 1 The John A. Hartford Business Innovation Award. aginganddisabilitybusinessinstitute.org/partnerships-in-action/the-john-a-hartford-foundation-business-innovation-award/
- 2 UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Massachusetts. www.uhc.com/communityplan/massachusetts#:~:text=UnitedHealthcare%20offers%20plans%20for%20Massachusetts%20residents%20who,dental%20*%20Vision%2C%20transportation%20and%20fitness%20benefits
- 3 Age-Friendly Care: The 4 Ms. www.johnahartford.org/grants-strategy/current-strategies/age-friendly/age-friendly-care#4ms
- 4 Medical Care Deserts. pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10567127/



Leaders in Aging Well at Home

About USAgings

USAgings is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers throughout the United States live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities. For more information, visit the [USAgings website](#) and follow @theUSAgings on Facebook, X and Instagram.



About the Aging and Disability Business Institute

The mission of the Aging and Disability Business Institute (Business Institute) is to build and strengthen partnerships and contracting between Area Agencies on Aging, aging and disability community-based organizations (CBOs), community care hubs (CCHs) and their networks, and health care entities. Led by USAgings, the Business Institute helps these organizations adapt to a changing health care environment and strengthen their organizational capacity to capitalize on emerging opportunities for sustainable funding. The Business Institute is home to the Center of Excellence to Align Health and Social Care, which funds and supports CCHs and the networks they lead. Learn more at the [Aging and Disability Business Institute website](#).

engaged

USAgings' Resource Center
for Engaging Older Adults

About Engaged: USAgings' Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults

Engaged: USAgings' Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults is a national initiative designed to enhance social engagement among older adults, individuals with disabilities and caregivers by expanding and strengthening the Aging Network's capacity to offer social engagement opportunities. Managed by USAgings and funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging, the Engaged Resource Center identifies and shares information about emerging trends and best practices, and develops resources and replication tools to support social engagement initiatives within the Aging Network. For more information, visit the [Engaged Resource Center website](#).



The
John A. Hartford
Foundation

About The John A. Hartford Foundation

The development of this case study was supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation, based in New York City, is a private, nonpartisan, national philanthropy dedicated to improving the care of older adults. The leader in the field of aging and health, the Foundation has three priority areas: creating age-friendly health systems, supporting family caregivers, and improving serious illness and end-of-life care. For more information, visit the [John A. Hartford Foundation website](#).

For more information about this project, visit the [Senior Connection, Inc. website](#).