



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 1200 / Washington, DC 20036 / Tel: 202-872-0888 / Fax: 202-872-0057 / www.n4a.org

The 2009 Digital Television Transition and Older Adults

Unique Challenges of Vulnerable Older Adults

At least eight million older adults rely on analog television sets and over-the-air television signals. Without proper education and hands-on assistance throughout the conversions to digital, those older adults could find their televisions go dark on February 17.

Older adults will have greater need for upgrades or converter boxes; may not be familiar or comfortable with the technology involved in the conversion; may face transportation hurdles in securing the converter devices they need and/or may find the out-of-pocket costs involved to be difficult to manage and in some cases, more than their limited budgets can bear. And, even if older adults are able to acquire a box, for many it will be a challenge to get it connected and to ensure that they can adequately utilize the new technology to use it.

What is Being Done to Assist Older Adults

The Keeping Seniors Connected Coalition, a coalition of eleven senior organizations led by n4a, received a \$ 2.7 million grant in November from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), U.S. Department of Commerce, to launch a national on-the-ground community-based campaign to ensure that the most vulnerable older Americans get the one-on-one assistance that they need to successfully make the conversion to digital programming.

By targeting 250,000 older adults in NTIA-defined geographic “hot zones,” the Keeping Seniors Connected project will, between December 2008 and March 31, 2009:

- Educate vulnerable older adults, specifically those who are minority, low-income, rural, homebound or have limited English proficiency, on the DTV conversion;
- Perform in-home assessments of vulnerable older adults, to determine the need for assistance with the DTV conversion;
- Increase the number of vulnerable older adults who apply for the converter box coupon; and
- Mobilize communities, through our memberships and community-based partnerships that our members have with volunteers and service providers, to offer one-on-one assistance to vulnerable older adults to help them complete the coupon application, obtain converter boxes, install converter boxes and utilize the new technology.

Additional Challenges

While the NTIA funding, along with FCC funding expected to reach the field shortly, is a tremendous asset to assisting older adults with the DTV conversion, challenges to ensure that older adults get the specialized assistance they need remain, including:

- Due to the 4 - 6 week processing time to secure a coupon, coupon applications should be submitted by the end of December for receipt prior to the conversion.
- Given that the transition is occurring in the winter months, in many parts of the country older adults will have difficulty traveling to the store to purchase converter boxes and/or to make necessary adjustments to roof-top television antennas. The weather may also impact obtaining volunteer assistance.

For more information, contact Sandy Markwood, n4a CEO, smarkwood@n4a.org.