

Pioneer Award Recipients

The Pioneer Award was established in 2016 by the NC Coalition on Aging to recognize individuals who have made long-time outstanding contributions to the field of aging in North Carolina. We are pleased to recognize three recipients of the Award this year. All three have been long time passionate aging advocates and leaders of the Coalition. Their work over the years has helped to guide the development of the Coalition and to ensure that addressing the needs of our state's older citizens remains the focus of all the Coalition does.

Richard “Dick” Hatch

Dick began advocating for older adults in North Carolina in 1990, first as a member of AARP's state legislative committee and later as its Chairman. In those capacities he lobbied successfully for and against bills in the NC General Assembly affecting the aging. Dick was a founding member of the NC Coalition on Aging and drafted its Bylaws which are still in use today. He served as the Coalition's President for two successive terms, as a representative for Access Dental Care and as an individual member. He has been a member of the NC Attorney General's Senior Fraud Task Force. Dick was a member of a team advocating for building a Senior Center in Cary, and after the Senior Center was built, he became a Director of Friends of Cary Senior Center, Inc. and currently serve as its President. He was a founding member and a Director of Cary SeniorNet (now Cary Senior Technology Education) engaged in teaching seniors how to use computers. Currently Dick is Wake County's Alternate to the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature and served as its Parliamentarian for six years.



Diana “Dee” Hatch

Dee began her career as an aging advocate in North Carolina when she was selected in 2000 to participate in the Duke Senior Leadership Initiative. At the same time she became an active volunteer with AARP NC, the AARP Cary Chapter and with the Triangle Older Women's League. In 2002 Dee was selected to serve on the initial executive council for AARP NC as the Communications Volunteer. She also became president of the Cary AARP Chapter. In 2005 Dee was selected to serve as North Carolina's AARP State President where she served through 2011. Other AARP activities and roles have included AARP Center to Champion Nursing in America, Future of Nursing NC Action Coalition, NC Board of Nursing Study of Advance Practice Nursing – Consumer representative, NC Center for Nursing Advisory Council and the ECU Center for Nursing Leadership Board of Directors. Other aging service roles have been serving as the Coalition's representative for the Triangle Older Women's League, providing community outreach with the Carolina's Centers for Medical Excellence and serving as a member and instructor/coach for the SeniorNet Learning Center of Cary.

Polly Williams – Pioneer Award Recipient



Since retiring as a professor of English at NC State University, Polly Williams has been a public policy advocate for older North Carolinians. In addition to the Coalition on Aging where she has served as an officer, she has shared her knowledge, expertise, and time with a number of other organizations including the NC Justice Center where she has volunteered since 2001 and has specialized in issues related to aging and health. Other key volunteer roles with an aging focus have been with the Triangle OWL (Older Women's League) where she served as President, AARP North Carolina where she was a member of the Capital City Task force for six years, and the Wake County Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee. She has served on a variety of task forces and committees, including several with the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services, related to aging issues including those pertaining to housing with services for older adults, prescription drug access, health planning, certificate of need, osteoporosis, and home and community based services. Legislative advocacy is of special interest to her and numerous pieces of legislation passed in the state are reflective of her hard work.