

Champion For Aging

Representative Donna McDowell White



Representative Donna McDowell White is a lifetime resident of Johnston County. She grew up in Clayton, attended Clayton High School, and graduated from Watts Hospital School of Nursing as a RN. She has a long history working as a public health nurse in communicable disease, as well as in public schools and home health. Rep. White has direct hands on knowledge of the needs of older adults. Prior to joining the North Carolina General Assembly, she served in the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health (DPH) as the In- Home Services program consultant. During her tenure at DPH she played a key role in establishing the standard of practice for geriatric case management in North Carolina and the country.

She later took on the role as Aging and Health Specialist in the NC DHHS Division of Aging and Adult Services. She continued to utilize her in-home expertise but also focused on fraud and abuse of older adults. Representative played a pivotal role in creation of the Victims Assistance Program, which is a model of intervention to assist elder victims of telemarketing fraud and scams. She served on the North Carolina Consumer Senior Fraud Taskforce and closely coordinated with the Attorney General's Office. As part of this role, she co-hosted of the "Carl & Donna Show" which was a radio show that highlighted fraud and scam prevention for the elderly.

Rep. White assumed office in the NC House of Representatives on January 1, 2017 and is currently serving in her third term representing District 26. Since arriving on Jones Street she has identified her occupation as a Registered Nurse and Aging Specialist. She is currently the Chair of Health and Human Services Appropriations, Chair of the Health Committee, Vice Chair of Appropriations, and a member of the Families, Children, and Aging Policy Committee. Throughout her tenure Rep. White has firmly and consistently voiced the need to support older North Carolinians and called attention to the demographic shift in our state's population. She has sponsored numerous bills supporting home and community-based services, family caregivers, health promotion and resident's in long-term care.

The NC Coalition on Aging is proud to recognize Rep. Donna McDowell White as a Champion for Aging for her extraordinary commitment to advancing aging issues through advocacy and policy work.

2021 Pioneer Award Recipients



Mary Bethel

Mary worked for over 45 years in the field of aging. She had a 30-year career at the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Aging and Adult Services, where she worked in an array of supervisory, administrative, and program capacities which included staffing the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature and Governor's Advisory Council on Aging. She then joined the staff of AARP North Carolina where she worked for 10 years as Associate State Director for Advocacy. Following retirement from AARP, in September of 2015 she was elected President of the Coalition on Aging where she, along with other key aging advocates in the state, began to explore how to strengthen the role of the Coalition so it could play a leadership role in moving the needle on aging issues in the state. Under her guidance, the Coalition began to expand its footprint with a broader scope of work and an increased membership. In September of 2018, she became the first Executive Director of the Coalition. With Mary's leadership, the Coalition increased its status and effectiveness in bringing together the diverse members of the aging community to improve the quality of life for older North Carolinians through collective advocacy, education, and public policy work. She has a special ability for bringing people and organizations together in building strong partnerships. She has the respect of elected officials on both sides of the aisle and possesses a keen insight into the inner workings of policy making. Since her retirement, she continues to serve on numerous boards, advisory committees and work groups related to aging and human services including the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging. She has received numerous awards for her advocacy, policy, and programming work.



Suzanne LaFollette Black

Suzanne is an empathetic, knowledgeable, and passionate activist for aging issues – working for over 42 years to better serve the aging population. She served as an 1 Area Agency on Aging Administrator covering four counties in the state where she effectively facilitated and developed programs addressing the needs of older adults. She was instrumental in establishing seven senior centers in her region to be the focal points on aging in their respective communities and helped to develop a continuum of care in the region through her leadership in program development, funds administration and quality assurance. Following this position, she assumed the role of Executive Director of the Moore County Department of Aging. She built the Department from the ground up starting with only herself and a part-time assistant. Under her direction, the agency grew to a staff of fifty. While in this position, she also developed the county's transit system. Suzanne worked for the last twenty years, until her retirement in June of this year, with AARP North Carolina where she was an Associate State Director. In this job, she worked to help people make the most out of life as they age. She provided important education and advocacy by developing training and educational workshops, building effective coalitions, and developing resources for family caregivers and fraud fighters. Most recently she was known for her work in the veteran's community having founded the "Celebration of Freedom," in Wilmington – a Veterans' Day event to honor those who serve the nation and their communities. Suzanne is the past President of the NC Association on Aging. She served on the Governor's Highway Safety Program Executive Committee and was recognized by the NC Public Transportation Association as Transit Advocate of the Year.



Dr. William M. “Billy” Dunlap

Dr. William M. “Billy” Dunlap has compassionately cared for patients for over half a century. During his career, he specialized in oncology and internal medicine with the Raleigh Medical Group. His contributions to the health and well-being of aging adults include co-founding and expanding one of the first hospices in North Carolina when in 1979 he co-founded Hospice of Wake County, Inc., which served six patients in its first year. The organization rebranded to Transitions LifeCare in 2014, and now serves thousands of patients annually - people who have advanced and life-threatening illnesses such as heart failure, respiratory diseases, COPD, cancer, Alzheimer’s and related dementias. Through his compassionate work, Dr. Dunlap has also inspired and collaborated with other organizations across North

Carolina to establish hospice programs throughout the state, and he has provided leadership to expand the field of hospice and palliative medicine and create pathways for physicians to go into the field. He has helped tens of thousands of older adults and their spouses and caregivers receive comfort and support at the end of life. After retirement from full-time practice in 2014, Dr. Dunlap has continued to practice medicine, serving older adults at The Oaks of Mayview skilled nursing facility. He also continues to advocate for the rights of older sick and frail adults to have dignity and quality of life, and he remains active on the Transitions LifeCare Board of Directors. In 2006, Dr. Dunlap was inducted into the Raleigh Hall of Fame in recognition of his many contributions.



Dennis W. Streets

Building on the values taught to him by his father who was a doctor in rural Florida who served a high number of older adults, Dennis’ lifelong career in the field of aging has touch nearly every segment of the lives of older adults. His career path has included positions that focused on social research, senior employment, adult foster care, health insurance, strategic planning, and nursing home administration. In each role Dennis brought his energy, enthusiasm, and a strong belief in making North Carolina better for its older citizens. His commitment to public service is paramount. While serving in state government

Dennis held various positions within the NC DHHS Division of Aging and Adult Services where he culminated his tenure there by serving as the Director of the agency from 2006-2014. In this position, he was a tireless servant leader but never lost sight of the important role of collaboration and partnership. His compassion, advocacy and visionary thinking created lasting models for programs and services. This includes the establishment of the Family Caregiver Support Program and early work to build livable-senior friendly communities to meet the changing needs of North Carolina. He also worked to build a bridge between the state’s research institutions and providers by creating learning opportunities through conferences and symposiums. Dennis currently serves as the Executive Director of the Chatham County Council on Aging where he ensures the effective delivery of an impressive and creative array of services. This work is a continuation of a long journey on behalf of older adults. Dennis has received recognition from the NC Association on Aging, NC Association of Agencies on Aging, NC SHIIP, and the Jane Kennedy award from the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging.