

# AGING TODAY

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## 2007 CONFERENCE TO 'RETHINK AGING' WITH DIVERSITY, BRAIN POWER

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Only a few weeks remain before the annual Joint Conference of the American Society on Aging (ASA) and National Council on Aging (NCOA) in Chicago, March 7–10. As the program planning cochairs for the conference, we have been honored during the past year to work with program track chairs, session reviewers and staff to develop the educational sessions and networking events that best reflect the Joint Conference theme, “Let’s Rethink Aging.” More than 3,500 professionals in aging from around the United States will gather at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers and surrounding venues to participate in nearly 1,000 education sessions, site visits and special events.

“Let’s Rethink Aging” is more than a conference theme. It is a challenge and opportunity for those working with older adults. The growth of the older adult population both in the U.S. and globally is driving some of the most significant social and economic developments of our time. In the face of this transformation, previous responses to aging and past perceptions of older adults simply don’t meet the realities of the 21st century.

### REMARKABLY DIVERSE

Today’s population of older adults is remarkably diverse, spanning from ages 50 to 100-plus and reaching across boundaries of culture and tradition. Elders range from the frail and ill to the independent, active and civically engaged. As professionals who work with older adults, we see both needs and strengths in this complex new reality of aging. We are confronted by an ever-changing economic and political climate that challenges us to develop new approaches to policy and practice.

The 2007 Joint Conference opens on Thursday, March 7, with a general session titled “On the Road: A Search for American Character,” sponsored by AARP. Playwright and performance artist Anna Deavere Smith will use her groundbreaking approach to theater to explore issues of race, community and character in the United States. Smith, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation “genius” Fellowship, creates a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism and intimate reverie.

Smith is most widely known for her role as the president’s national security adviser on NBC-TV’s *The West Wing*. She came to public attention as the author and performer of two one-performer plays about racial tension in American cities. “Fires in the Mirror” won an Obie Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; “Twilight: Los Angeles 1992” earned another Obie and was nominated for a Tony Award.

Critical Issues in Aging sessions will examine such topics as older workers, Medicare Part D, collaboration across the continuum, Alzheimer’s research, medication issues, and health promotion and wellness. Highlights from some of these sessions include:

- **Technology and Aging** (Thursday, March 8)—Technology permeates and facilitates all aspects of modern life at home, at work and in the community. Yet, although technology should be a critical component of services to older adults, there has been little acknowledgement or understanding among serv-

ice providers of technology's role in improving the lives of older adults. An expert panel will discuss how a variety of technologies can help promote independence, maximize functional abilities and facilitate caregiving. The session will be presented by ASA's Network on Environments, Services and Technologies for Maximizing Independence (NEST) and sponsored by Intel. NEST will follow the session with a daylong special program titled "Technology in Support of Aging: Expanding Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges."

• **The Politics, Policies and Realities of Aging in Community** (Thursday, March 8)—This symposium will address issues related to shifting the accepted paradigm in the field of aging from *aging in place* to *aging in community*. Leading thinkers will explore such questions as: Are we focused too literally on helping elders to live within their present four walls? Is aging in place a policy best suited for everyone? Are there other long-term care housing solutions worth pursuing that may be acceptable and affordable? Should the field move instead toward a policy perspective that replaces the individual focus on aging in place with one that concentrates on the collective potential for aging in community.

• **CHOICES for Independence: Modernization of the Aging Network** (Friday, March 9)—This session, sponsored by the U.S. Administration on Aging, will discuss the principles behind the CHOICES for Independence program, which was imbedded in the Older Americans Act when it was recently reauthorized by Congress. Presenters include Assistant Secretary of Aging Josefina Carbonell and a prominent group of federal and state officials, as well as private-sector partners.

### THE MATURE BRAIN

The conference will close Saturday, March 10, with a look at "Staying Sharp: Current Advances in Brain Research." This session includes a conversation among neuroscientists and public health leaders, who will examine the latest information about the mature brain and lifestyle activities that may affect brain health. Attendees will receive information crafted by the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives and AARP's National Retired Teachers Association, including five booklets on improving one's quality of life, minimizing memory loss, lifelong learning, recognizing and managing depression and understanding chronic health issues.

Preconference special programs and intensives (full-day and half-day workshops) will be presented on Tuesday, March 6, the day before the Joint Conference. These programs, each with their own expert faculties, will focus on such subjects as ethnic leadership, evidence-based physical activity, emergency preparedness and senior centers.

On Monday, March 5, there will be a special program, "First National Conference for Caregiving Coalitions," hosted by the National Alliance for Caregiving. Attendees will share best practices, learn about ways to work together to advocate for family caregivers, develop strategies for sustaining programs in the long term, and create effective messages for community outreach. Visit [www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org) for more information.

Also, Monday, March 5, and continuing on Tuesday, March 6, will be the fourth annual "What's Next? Boomer Business Summit," coproduced by ASA's Business Forum on Aging and Mary Furlong and Associates. This program will focus on how innovative companies, entrepreneurs and organizations can tap the lucrative market of boomers, who are now ages 40 to 60. Speakers will explore how to best reach these consumers with products and services in such areas as healthcare, financial services and lifestyles enhancements. Visit [www.boomersummit.com](http://www.boomersummit.com) for more information.

Additionally, the Joint Conference offers many networking events, site visits and local dining options, which allow attendees to connect with old friends and colleagues—and meet new ones. The Local Arrangements Committee will produce a series of events and activities, including the Friday night "Chicago, Your Kind of Town," celebrating the Windy City's diversity in music, cuisine and cultures. This free event for conference registrants is sponsored by the Chicago Department on Aging.

We'd like to give special thanks to the committee's cochairs Amy Eisenstein, education coordinator at the Section of Geriatric Medicine, Rush University Medical Center, and Robin Tillotson, regional director at the Chicago Department of Aging, as well as to the more than 50 subcommittee chairs and volunteers who helped develop a great hospitality program.

ASA will also host its annual Leadership Salutes reception to honor longtime ASA President and CEO Gloria Cavanaugh, who announced her retirement from the association last autumn.

Complete information on the conference, including description of all the sessions, continuing education credit and hotel and travel information, can be found on the 2007 ASA-NCOA Joint Conference website at [www.agingconference.org](http://www.agingconference.org), where attendees can plan their schedule online.

We look forward to welcoming you to Chicago. Join us as we rethink the possibilities for our aging society. ❖

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