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For more information contact:
Deb Bukovy, Marketing Specialist
Phone: (708) 383-0258
Email: deb.bukovy@ageoptions.org

Older Americans Month Theme, "Powered by Connection," Raises Awareness of the Impacts of Social Isolation

(Oak Park, IL) – As the aging network across America celebrate Older Americans Month in May, **AgeOptions,** the principal source of information about older adult services in suburban Cook County, wants to make sure that older adults and unpaid caregivers are aware and taking advantage of the various programs and services available through its network of more than 100 partner agencies.

AgeOptions, a nonprofit based in Oak Park, is an Area Agency on Aging that promotes better health outcomes and quality of life so older adults can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes for as long as possible.

This year's theme for Older Americans Month is "Powered by Connection" to address a key social determinant of health: social isolation. U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, MD, cited in his 2023 report that loneliness can contribute to heart disease, stroke and dementia, and results in billions of dollars in health care costs.

"All of us have an opportunity and the privilege of staying socially connected to older adults and gaining knowledge from their life experiences," said AgeOptions President and CEO Diane Slezak. "If you have the opportunity to reach out to neighbors and relatives, do it. It doesn't have to be time-consuming. You may not have to do a lot for it to mean a lot to an older person."

Each week in May, AgeOptions will share information with its constituents about its various programs that promote connectedness in the communities it serves:
- Week 1: Under the Library Cares program, public libraries in suburban Cook County offer programs to provide socialization and bridge the digital divide.
- Week 2: Illinois Pathways to Health provides interactive workshops aimed at improving overall health and well-being to better manage chronic conditions and reduce fall risks.
- Week 3: Caring Together, Living Better offers services through west suburban faith- and community-based organizations to support low-income Black and Latinx caregivers.

- Week 4: [Thrive with Pride](#) provides welcoming and inclusive services to all, regardless of sexual orientation, relationship status, or gender identity, and is particularly focused on combatting social isolation among LGBT+ older adults and caregivers.

Additionally, AgeOptions provides information about services for unpaid caregivers through its 9 Caregiver Resource Centers. There are an estimated 1.5 million unpaid caregivers in Illinois. A research project by AARP Illinois found that caregivers provide $21 billion of care and pay an average $7,500 out of pocket to meet their loved one's daily needs.

AgeOptions advocates to increase state funding (HB5358 & SB3919) for the Illinois Family Caregiver Act to support unpaid family caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren. Increased funding would allow Caregiver Resource Centers throughout Illinois to provide respite services, stress reduction programs, memory cafes and other supports to 1.5 million caregivers in Illinois.

AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds, and individual contributions. In 2023, AgeOptions and its partners served 230,976 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have diverse populations of more than 602,017 older adults.

AgeOptions has served older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org, or our Facebook and YouTube pages.