

Maryland seniors to benefit from new call-check system

by Renée Shreve
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — The Maryland Department of Aging has launched an automated call initiative designed to check on the status of the state's older adults.

"This is an excellent opportunity for our seniors who live alone," said Lori Lewis, Maryland Access Point manager at Garrett County Aging and Nutrition, about the pilot program. "Daily checks will allow them to be a little more secure in their independence."

Maryland is the first state in the nation to provide this type of service, which is free to residents age 65 or older who have a landline phone or cellphone.

Participants will receive an automated telephone call at a certain time each day. If they do not answer that call, the service will try two more times. If participants do not answer on the third attempt, a call will then be placed to their designated emergency contacts, who will be encouraged to check on their friends or loved ones to make sure they are alright.

"A large number of seniors in Garrett County live alone, so I believe that we could potentially see quite a few take



Staff photo by Renée Shreve

Garrett County Community Action's Lori Lewis, left, Maryland Access Point manager, is pictured recently with Pam Hageman, former director of Aging and Nutrition Services, reviewing programs available to local senior residents. One of the newest initiatives is an automated call-check system just launched by the Maryland Department of Aging.

advantage of this service," Lewis said.

According to the Maryland Department of Aging, one in four Americans age 65 and older fall each year. In addition, every 11 seconds an older adult is treated in an emergency room for a fall.

sooner," Lewis said.

The Department of Aging stresses that the check-in program is not a medical alert or distress system. There are no live operators, and 911 will not be automatically dialed.

Persons interested in the service must apply on their own behalf and provide their name, county or city of residence, phone number, date of birth, the name and phone number of their contact person and the time they would like to receive their daily call.

The Maryland Department of Aging asks that individuals sign up for the call-check program by visiting aging.maryland.gov or calling 410-767-1276.

"They need a certain number of applicants to begin the service, so directing intake to one central office probably makes it easier to keep track of the number of applicants registered," Lewis said about the department.

She noted, however, her office would be happy to an-

Lewis recalled a recent case in which a resident had fallen in her home, could not get up and lay on the floor for "hours and hours" before someone happened to come by and assist her.

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swer any questions that individuals might have about the program.

"But, ultimately, we will be referring them to the website or phone number for registration," Lewis said people applying on their own behalf.

Garrett County Community Action's MAP office and Aging and Nutrition division offers numerous services for local residents.

"We strive to keep seniors living at home independently for as long as possible," Lewis said. "Through other programs, such as senior home delivered meals, we have come to realize that providing a daily check on these individuals is as important in many cases as providing the meal. The Maryland Senior Call Check Program offers yet another way to check on vulnerable seniors, providing them a little more security at home."

For more information, call Community Action at 301-533-9000.

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"Theoretically, if she were on this program and had not been able to answer her phone when she was called, a representative would have been contacted to check on her, and assistance may have come