

Answering the Call Frequently Asked Questions

What is "engAGING Communities Tennessee"?

engAGING Communities Tennessee is an initiative led by the UTC School of Nursing in affiliation with other partners across the state. The initiative focuses on bringing hope to aging populations and their caregivers through education and support. More information: www.utc.edu/engaging-communities.

Who is an "Older Adult"?

People often ask "what age is an older adult? The truth is, we all age differently. We each face challenges that are unique to our own stories. Our environment, level of health, and access to community resources determine the level of support we each need to age successfully. In general, when referring to older adults, most people are speaking of adults who fall into the age group of 65 years or older.

Why does INDEED focus on Older Adults?

Older adults are healthier when they have food, transportation, affordable housing, health care, and are socially active. With the support of trained volunteers, they have better quality of life and are less likely to go to the emergency room or need hospitalization. They are also able to live independently in their homes longer, delay nursing home admission, and present early death. It is important for us to communicate that we can all age successfully, and that there are resources in the community for support. The trick is identifying community resources and teaching local volunteers how to access them.

Why Faith-Based and Religious Communities?

Research has long shown the value of partnerships between faith-based and religious community program volunteers, public health officials and health care providers. Once trained, volunteers can function as care extenders by providing support through promoting healthy living and offering guidance with referrals to community resources.

What do you mean by "Answering the Call"?

Tennessee faith-based and religious leaders, volunteers, and congregants have been committed to answering the call when residents are in need in their local communities and across the state. During the COVID-19 pandemic, countless faith-based and religious communities stepped up to support not only their congregants, but also their surrounding neighborhoods. Faith-based and religious communities also participate in emergency or disaster response networks with volunteers who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice providing clean up, repairs, food, clothing, and spiritual support with a message of hope and love.

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These examples show the importance of building and strengthening support for our vulnerable communities. Neighborhoods with less access to public health and community support are healthier when trusted leaders and volunteers live and work in the local community. They are bonded by the connection of someone who also understands the history, values and beliefs that shape the lives of their congregants.

What is a "Dementia-Friendly Community"?

The population of older adults in Tennessee is rapidly growing and older adults are at especially high risk for poor health outcomes related to dementia and caregiving. As the number of people living with dementia increases, the need for community support has never been more important. To that end, the Tennessee Department of Health has answered the call by developing a dementia-friendly community toolkit that provides guidelines on how to build community capacity to meet the needs of people living with dementia and their caregivers. One of the goals is to engage faith-based and religious communities in activities which not only provide education and support for those living with dementia and their caregivers, but also provide opportunities for leaders, volunteers, and congregants to serve those who are unable to attend typical worship services and activities.

How is The University of Tennessee Chattanooga's School of Nursing supporting vulnerable communities impacted by COVID-19, persons living with dementia, and their caregivers?

As an extension of recent work on behalf of persons living with dementia and their caregivers, UTC School of Nursing continues to promote awareness of dementia friendly communities. Our newest initiative, the Intrastate Network to Deliver Equity and Eliminate Disparities (INDEED) provides a unique opportunity to partner with and reach vulnerable communities heavily impacted by COVID-19 and who historically struggle with equitable access to health care and social supports.

Who are INDEED's core partners?

The INDEED staff has partnered with key experts and community organizations to provide trainings for volunteers interested in learning how to support older adult congregants and their caregivers in tangible ways. From supporting someone who has been discharged from the hospital to providing disaster and emergency preparedness training to caregivers, INDEED is Answering the Call across the state of Tennessee. We are bringing a message of hope and the tools for all congregations to serve older adults in ways that allow for successful aging and meaningful community engagement.

Who can volunteer?

Participating in "Answering the Call" does not require special skills, just a willing heart. There are many opportunities to serve across Answering the Call programs. From providing event support to playing games with older adults, there is a pot for everyone.