

Upcoming Events

NARCOG Board Meeting
DATES: Oct. 27 at 10 a.m.;
November and December TBD
LOCATION: NARCOG Board
Room - Decatur

Medicare Open Enrollment
begins Oct. 15 and continues
through Dec. 7.

Agency Contacts

Tennille Harkins
Director
tennille.harkins@adss.alabama.gov

Julie Campbell
ADRC/SHIP Coordinator
julie.campbell@adss.alabama.gov

Dana Dobson
AL CARES Coordinator
dana.dobson@adss.alabama.gov

Ronette Gravitt
Nutrition Coordinator
ronette.gravitt@adss.alabama.gov

Daffney Harris
SCSEP Coordinator
daffney.harris@adss.alabama.gov

Chasity Johnson
Regional Ombudsman
chasity.johnson@adss.alabama.gov

Stephanie King
SeniorRX Coordinator
stephanie.king@adss.alabama.gov

Deborah Wilson
Medicaid Waiver Division Mgr.
deborah.wilson@adss.alabama.gov

Information ON THE WEB

www.narco.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

facebook.com/narcojal

Adjusting to life with ALS

Hartselle family hopes experience can help others

Sandra and Eric Kimbrough were blindsided by the news.

Until last year, the Hartselle couple were living typical, routine lives.

Then, in November, everything changed.

That is when Eric, 50, was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which is also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.

"Getting that diagnosis was tough," Sandra said. "You can't even begin to describe the magnitude



of emotions you experience."

Since being diagnosed, the challenges experienced by the Kimbrough family have intensified — both emotionally and financially.

Eric's ALS has rapidly progressed — much faster than Sandra expected. During the past year, Eric has almost lost use of his hands. Communicating and swallowing food is also a challenge.

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NARCOG adds attorney for senior legal services

Proving assistance with legal services for seniors is a valuable program offered by the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG).

NARCOG now is expanding this popular program.

In September, NARCOG contracted with Legal Services of Alabama (LSA) to provide a full-time Title III-B attorney to serve

seniors 60 and older in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties.

Through this contract, Chigra Vinson now is the staff attorney at LSA who is housed full-time at the NARCOG office in Decatur.

All legal services provided by NARCOG are free to seniors 60 and older in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties.

"Ms. Vinson is excited to be able

to provide legal services for our seniors in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties," NARCOG Area Agency on Aging Director Tennille Harkins said. "She currently is working on the waiting list that accumulated over the last few months when NARCOG did not have a contracted legal attorney."

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Center for Workforce Inclusion awards SCSEP grant

The Center for Workforce Inclusion has awarded the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) Area Agency on Aging a grant that will provide temporary employment for older adults in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties through the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

The Center for Workforce Inclusion grant awarded the NARCOG SCSEP program \$230,057 in funds.

Almost 90 percent of this grant — originally from the U.S. Department of Labor — will provide temporary employment to no less than 43 low-income older adults living in Cullman,

Lawrence and Morgan counties. These older adults will participate in the SCSEP program, which is a cornerstone of the Older Americans Act.

"SCSEP was a true blessing during the COVID-19 pandemic," NARCOG Executive Director Robby Cantrell said.

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Robby Cantrell | Executive Director

North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments | PO Box C • 216 Jackson St. SE • Decatur, AL 35602
256-355-4515 | robby.cantrell@adss.alabama.gov

Medicare Open Enrollment begins in October

Medicare's Open Enrollment period has arrived.

The Medicare Open Enrollment period, which officially begins on October 15 and continues through December 7, is when clients can make changes to their Medicare coverage.

Because Medicare Open Enrollment can be a complicated process, the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) office serves to help residents in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties navigate the process through the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP).

NARCOG SHIP Coordinator Julie Campbell currently is scheduling appointments for Medicare Open Enrollment. Campbell is scheduling appointments for both in-person and via phone. Anyone who lives in Cullman County who would prefer



to see someone locally can contact the Cullman County Commission on Aging to schedule an appointment.

"All services are free and unbiased," NARCOG Area Agency on Aging Director Tennille Harkins said. "Our goal is to find the plan that works best for you."

During the 2020 open enrollment

period, the NARCOG Area Agency on Aging (AAA) helped 1,782 Medicare beneficiaries in the region save \$882,372.

WHAT CHANGES CAN BE MADE?

During Medicare's Open Enrollment, clients can make changes to their health insurance coverage, including adding, dropping

or changing their Medicare Advantage and Part D coverage. Any changes made take effect on January 1, 2022.

The changes a client can make include joining a new Medicare Advantage Plan or Part D prescription drug plan, switching from original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage Plan, and switching from a Medicare Advantage Plan to Original Medicare.

WHAT TO BRING?

While attending a SHIP appointment, beneficiaries should plan to bring a complete list of medications and all insurance cards. Individuals may also provide proof of income to be screened for programs that can assist in paying premiums and co-payments for Medicare and lower drug co-payments.

FROM PAGE 1: ATTORNEY

Vinson will be able to assist the region's seniors with legal advice, simple wills, power of attorneys, advanced directives, evictions, Medicare and Social Security Insurance issues. Title III-B legal services will not be able to assist with criminal matters.



Vinson

Providing legal services to seniors is not a new NARCOG program. But in the past, an attorney was only available to provide 20-30 hours of service per month. By having an attorney on site, NARCOG can now provide 40 hours of legal services per week.

Seniors in the region who want to utilize NARCOG's legal services program should contact the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) at 256-355-4515 to be screened.

FROM PAGE 1: SCSEP

"SCSEP participants were able to keep training from home. Continuing to receive funds prevented participants from increased hardships, and now the participants are safely returning to their training sites where they help local community, faith-based, and public agencies carry out their missions, such as the Cullman County Public Library, The Link of Cullman County, and Morgan County DHR.

"By working in SCSEP positions, SCSEP is providing hope and dignity to low-income jobseekers 55 and older who have the toughest employment challenges. The grant from the Center is essential to our being able to deliver this program in our community."

SCSEP, the only federal job training program targeted exclusively to low-income older jobseekers, promotes personal dignity and self-sufficiency through work. It's temporary, part-time community service jobs provide a hand-up, not a hand-out for



older, unemployed low-income Americans. SCSEP allows eligible persons to participate for up to four years, but nationally, the average tenure is 19 months with the experience and training received leading to permanent employment.

As the largest U.S. Department of Labor National Grantee of SCSEP, the Center for Workforce Inclusion works through a network of local partners delivering various career training programs for el-

igible 55-plus-year-old workers in 34 states. To date, the Center has placed more than 90,000 older workers into permanent employment through the SCSEP program.

"Our long-term, local partners are a key to the strength of the Center and provide the systems to train older Americans into strategic advantage for employers and the Country," said Gary A. Officer, Center for Workforce Inclusion President and CEO.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are needed to help deliver meals to homebound seniors in Lawrence and Morgan counties.

To volunteer for this program, contact NARCOG Outreach Coordinator Justin Graves at 256-345-4515.

NARCOG continues to provide seniors with nutritious meals

Ensuring nutritious meals are available to the Region’s senior citizens is a priority for the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments’ (NARCOG) Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, for most of 2020 and the first part of 2021, senior centers throughout the state were closed. Throughout this period, the NARCOG AAA Nutrition Program, in partnership with the Commission on Aging agencies for Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties, provided nutritious meals for seniors who were 60 and older.

The Region’s senior centers pro-

vided hot “drive through” meals to those who normally would come to the senior centers for activities, and meals were delivered to homebound seniors. Shelf-stable meals were also added to the hot meals to help ensure that seniors had enough food to eat during a time when many were unable to visit grocery stores.

“NARCOG Nutrition Coordinator Ronette Gravitt also made sure all of the centers’ meal recipients received nutrition education and entertaining activities that were delivered monthly,” NARCOG AAA Director Tennille Harkins said. “We had contests with prizes to try to keep our seniors engaged as

much as possible while still being at home.”

Because hot meals were not always available due to the distance to a center, or a lack of volunteers to deliver the meals due to concerns about the pandemic; the need for meals across the Region’s three counties increased during this time period. Because of this, NARCOG’s frozen meal program grew.

Five to seven packed frozen meals were delivered weekly to seniors 60 and older who were homebound and in need of food. NARCOG worked to ensure that every senior who needed food received meals. NARCOG served

a total of 51,089 hot congregate meals, 130,811 home delivered meals (including hot meals and Shelf-Stable meals), and 70,735 frozen home delivered meals from Oct. 1, 2020 through Aug. 31, 2021.

The total number of meals served in the region during this period was 252,635.

Senior centers in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties are now open and serving seniors daily with a hot meal and activities.

Anyone 60 and older who is interested in joining a center can contact NARCOG or their local council on aging for more details.

FROM PAGE 1: ALS

“Everything has happened very fast,” Sandra said. “Eric has lost quite a bit of weight, and he has trouble getting around the house with his walker. He’s had a couple of falls. It’s been difficult.”

In September, Eric was sized for a wheelchair, and he will be given a feeding tube in October.

But like most homes, the Kimbrough residence previously was not handicap accessible. This year, Sandra has addressed that issue.

It has been overwhelming.

Retrofitting a home to make it handicap accessible can cost \$40,000 or more. Hallways and door-

ways need to be widened. Wheelchair ramps need to be installed. Safety railing and adjustments need to be made in bathrooms. Rooms need expanding to make maneuvering a wheelchair possible.

The costs add up.

In the Kimbrough family’s case, the supply issues — and increased material costs — created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have added to the burden.

“It’s been extremely frustrating,” Sandra said. “The expenses have added up very quickly, and on top of that, it’s been hard to find contractors to finish the work. This has been

going on for a while. There are several days where I have to find a place to myself and collect my thoughts. It’s been overwhelming.”

Unfortunately, typical grant program funds are not available for retrofitting a home to make it handicap accessible.

NARCOG, however, was able to provide assistance with funds from the NARCOG Foundation.

“When I heard the Kimbroughs’ story, I immediately wanted to help them,” NARCOG Executive Director Robby Cantrell said. “I knew that the NARCOG Foundation could help.

“The NARCOG Foundation was

able to provide funding for the addition of a safe room inside the Kimbrough residence. Many of the programs we provide rely upon gifts to meet the needs of those within the region. Our NARCOG Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that provides assistance to older adult or disabled clients to meet the unmet needs of other programs and services. One-hundred percent of the funds donated are used for client assistance.”

For more information on contributions to the NARCOG Foundation, visit us online at www.narcog.org/impact/impact-giving.