

TAMPA BAY 211



Thanks to the focused efforts of Sen. **Ed Hooper** and Rep. **Chris Latvala**, the Legislature this year funded a new pilot program being launched by 211 Tampa Bay providing outreach to seniors in Pinellas and Hernando counties to make sure they have access to the services they need from local government.

Older adults in these counties have reported difficulty in dealing with public programs and not knowing which services are available or how to access the services they need. More than one in four residents of Hernando and Pinellas counties are over the age of 65. These citizens are among the most vulnerable to isolation and depression, risks exacerbated during health emergencies, hurricanes and other crises.

In 2019, local health surveys in Pinellas County showed 40% of seniors in Pinellas County reported needing help with mental health and over 35% said they were dealing with the loss of a close family member or friend. Mental health was also a top priority in Hernando County, where older residents said it was the most common health challenge and the service most difficult to obtain.

Sponsored by Republican Sen. Hooper of Palm Harbor and Republican Rep. Latvala of Clearwater, the \$500,000 appropriation for a Seniors Wellness Support & Crisis Response program will ensure these vulnerable citizens are informed and referred to the appropriate service providers for their social services and mental health needs on a regular basis and in times of crisis.

Rep. Chris Latvala is part of the team that helped start proactive outreach to well-seasoned Floridians.
Photo by The Workmans

The organization 211 Tampa Bay Cares is one of 12 certified 211 network providers in Florida that operate as the single point of coordination for information on health and human services, providing free confidential information and referral services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The group is also asked to stand up crisis response locally and at the state level once a disaster occurs, but does not have sufficient funding to manage the surge during emergencies. Call volumes to 211 Tampa Bay Cares doubled during Hurricane Irma and tripled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To provide proactive outreach, information, referrals and care coordination, this program will provide a dedicated support project team for Pinellas and Hernando counties to recruit and train volunteers to assist seniors with connections and quarterly wellness checks, distribute informational materials, and organize community outreach, awareness and crisis response efforts for up to 300,000 older adults living in these communities.

In addition to linking this population to community-based services, 211 Tampa Bay Cares will provide system navigation, advocacy and ongoing support, including wellness check-ins up to four times a year through its partnership with Duke Energy, Allstate and other trained volunteers. Technology upgrades will enable phone prompts in Spanish and access to 211 services for elderly persons with disabilities.