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## **Region Chosen for National Pilot Project on Aging**

**PHOENIX (April 25, 2012)** –The MetLife Foundation and Partners for Livable Communities has selected the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) and the Greater Phoenix region to participate in the City Leaders Institute on Aging in Place, a new national pilot project striving to help people aged 65 years and more to live independently in their homes. The region was chosen as just one of five areas in the country to develop strategies over the next year that will help seniors age in place.

Penny Cuff, vice president for programs with Partners for Livable Communities, said the region was chosen based on its track record of innovative work in aging services. “The Greater Phoenix region is recognized as being a leader in meeting the needs of older adults. Recent achievements like the MAG Municipal Aging Services Project reflect a commitment to care for people as they age.”

The Municipal Aging Services Project, sponsored by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, developed a tool kit local governments can use when considering services for people aged 65 years and more. Extensive community engagement with more than 1,300 seniors reflected a keen desire to live independently in their homes, or age in place. Participants also expressed deep concern about the recession’s impact on their ability to remain in their homes.

The Institute will address these concerns by developing new strategies to help people age in place more successfully. Partners for Livable Communities will aid the region by recruiting national experts to assist the region throughout the next year. A regional, multidisciplinary team of local leaders will also guide the work of the Institute over the next year.

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton is a member of the team. “In the City of Phoenix and throughout the region, we have successful programs and services in place to serve older adults. Dramatic increases in the population and their diverse needs will affect what assistance is needed and how it can most effectively be given. I have been meeting with older adults to determine what we can do differently. Ensuring people can remain safe and healthy in their homes is one of my key priorities,” said Stanton.

Local funders share this priority as well. Carol Kratz, program director with the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and a member of the Institute’s team, emphasizes the need for strategic investments. “It has been a challenge to fully meet people’s needs due to economic conditions and increased demand for services—but business as usual is not an option. We need to be smart as funders and diligently look for new models that can meet needs more effectively,” said Kratz.

Mary Lynn Kasunic, president and CEO of the Area Agency on Aging, Region One, also sees the benefit of considering new ways of meeting needs, particularly in partnership with the community. “This Institute can help us determine a new model, one that engages older adults as part of the solution. They are often overlooked resources in our community,” she said.

Michelle Dionisio, president of Benevilla, a private nonprofit agency in Surprise, notes the benefits of engaging older adults to help meet needs. “Our more than 770 volunteers are the lifeline we have with the community,” she says. “Every day, people’s lives are better because of the assistance people give to their neighbors. We are going back to how we used to take care of each other. Meeting people’s needs is not just the responsibility of government or nonprofit agencies. It is everyone’s responsibility.”

Other communities participating in the City Leaders Institute on Aging in Place include San Diego, Miami, Arlington County in Virginia, and Montgomery County in Maryland.

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