



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

The 2009 Digital Television Transition and Seniors

ON FEBRUARY 17, 2009, the nation's television broadcasters will switch from analog to digital transmission of television signals. It is estimated that at least eight million older adults rely on analog television sets and over-the-air television signals. Without proper education and hands-on assistance throughout the conversion to digital, those eight million older adults could find their televisions go dark on February 17.

What Is the Digital Television (DTV) Transition?

Not to be confused with “high definition” or “flat screen” or other modern television features, **digital refers to the way that television broadcasts are delivered to your television set.** Older televisions only pick up analog signals, so when the nation's broadcasters switch to digital transmission on February 17, 2009, analog televisions without cable or satellite service will stop receiving free, over-the-air television signals.

There is good reason for the switch to digital transmission, as it will free up lots of broadcast spectrum space, some of which has been reserved for use by emergency responders. Switching to digital also has a benefit to consumers: broadcasters will be able to offer more channels, and the picture quality of even older sets will be improved.



What Will Consumers Have to Do to Prevent Their TV from Going Dark?

Many consumers won't have to do a thing — households that subscribe to cable or satellite service, or households with a new digital television, do not need to take any action.

But if you rely on free, over-the-air broadcasts *and* don't have a digital television, you will need to do ONE of the following:

- Purchase a digital converter box to attach to your existing television. (Retail price is expected to be \$55–75, but government coupons worth \$40 will be available in early 2008. The newly developed boxes sit on top of your television, changing the digital signal being broadcast to analog so your television can “read” it).
- Upgrade your television to a new digital model.
- Subscribe to cable or satellite service.

More consumer information and resources are available at the end of this fact sheet.

How Will the DTV Transition Affect Older Adults?

While millions of seniors will weather the digital transition smoothly, there is a subset of older adults who may be left behind. The older adults that Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and Title VI Native American aging programs serve are frailer, older, poorer, more vulnerable, or more likely to face other challenges than the “average” American over age 60. This population of older adults is more likely to:



- have older, analog TVs;
- rely on over-the-air television;
- not be familiar with new technology or how to use it to access information;
- have physical, financial or transportation barriers that would prevent them from purchasing and installing a converter box; and
- suffer real consequences — isolation from society, anxiety, mental or physical decline as a result — if their TVs go dark on February 17, 2009.

What Can Be Done to Help These Older Adults Successfully Make the DTV Transition?

The Aging Network (the federal, state and local agencies that coordinate home and community-based services to older adults and their caregivers) is well positioned to be the conduit between the government and private interests on DTV and the elderly who are most likely to need assistance. Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and Title VI programs work with these individuals every day, are trusted by them and their caregivers, and have mechanisms for information distribution and the provisions of hands-on assistance.

Unfortunately, not enough funds have been allocated by the federal government for consumer education and outreach. The budget for national consumer education and outreach is less than what other nations spent on just one city or region of their smaller country during their transition process! None of these limited dollars have been set aside to help those who will need direct, one-on-one assistance in making the transition.

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is working to raise the visibility of this issue with national decision makers and is advocating for direct funding (either from government and/or private industry) to assist the most vulnerable American households in making this transition. Additionally, n4a intends to educate its membership of AAAs and Title VI Native American aging programs, offering technical assistance and information so that these local aging agencies can begin to assist older adults in their communities, as additional resources become available.

Further Information on the DTV Transition

For general information about DTV:

- www.dtv.gov or 888-CALL-FCC (U.S. Federal Communications Commission)
- www.dtvtransition.org (DTV Transition Coalition, of which n4a is a member)
- www.dtvanswers.com (National Association of Broadcasters)
- <http://www.rl.tv/Home/PressRoom/AreYouPrepared/tabid/756/Default.aspx> (Retirement Living Television)

For specific information about the Converter Box Coupon Program:

- <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon/index.html> or 888-DTV-2009 (U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration)

For a fact sheet on installing a digital converter box:

- <http://content.ce.org/dtv/converterQSG.pdf> (Consumer Electronics Association)

The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging** (n4a) is the umbrella organization for the 650 area agencies on aging (AAAs) and more than 230 Title VI Native American aging programs in the U.S. The fundamental mission of the AAAs and Title VI programs is to provide services which make it possible for older individuals to remain in their home, thereby preserving their independence and dignity. These agencies coordinate and support a wide range of home- and community-based services, including information and referral, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, employment services, senior centers, adult day care and a long-term care ombudsman program. **www.n4a.org**