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## Home and Community-Based Services for Older Adults: Older Americans Act

**T**he Older Americans Act (OAA) has been the foundation of services for older adults in the United States since its inception in 1965 and forms the nucleus of our national system of home and community-based services for older Americans. The OAA provides funding to states for a range of community planning and service programs to older Americans at risk of losing their independence. Since its enactment, the OAA has been amended fourteen times to expand the scope of services, increase local control and responsibility, and add more protections for the frail elderly.

### Issue Background

#### **The Aging Network**

**T**o develop and implement the wide array of OAA services, a system of federal, state and local agencies, known as the aging network was established. The core of the aging network is the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), State Units on Aging (SUA), and Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The AoA and SUAs were established under the initial Act; AAAs were added in 1973 to respond to the needs of Americans aged 60 and over in every local community. The network also includes Native American aging programs, known as "Title VI agencies," service providers, and aging research, education, and advocacy organizations. Together these groups work to maintain the comprehensive and coordinated system of services that make up the national home and community-based care system for the aging. Currently, there are 56 SUAs, 655 AAAs, 236 Title VI agencies, and over 29,000 direct service providers throughout the United States.

#### **OAA Programs and Services**

**T**he OAA services available through the aging network fall into five broad categories: information and access services; community-based services; in-home services;

housing; and elder rights. These categories include support services such as congregate and home-delivered meals, in-home services, caregiver support, transportation, senior centers, nursing home ombudsman, employment and services for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians.

The wide range of OAA services administered by the aging network enable it to direct consumers to service choices that best meet their individual needs. In particular, AAAs and Title VI agencies play a pivotal role in assessing community needs and developing programs that respond to those needs. These agencies act as advocates for improved services for older persons and their families. They often serve as portals to care, assessing multiple service needs, determining eligibility, authorizing or purchasing services and monitoring the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of services. They also provide direct services as well as contract with local providers to furnish services in the community.

All AAAs and Title VI agencies support a range of home and community-based services, but services vary across communities. While there is much consistency in the types of essential home and community-based services available across the country, these services are customized to reflect local needs and caregiver resources.

Congress took an important first step toward recognizing the value and considering the needs of caregivers with the enactment of the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), as part of the OAA amendments of 2000. The NFCSP provides grants to States to help hundreds of communities assist thousands of family members who are struggling to care for their older loved ones who are ill or who have disabilities.

## Policy Issues

OAA appropriations provide funds to the AoA for administrative and program expenses for all titles of the OAA with the exception of Title V: the Community Service Employment Program, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor. While the OAA has received incremental funding increases over the last several years, it has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population of individuals eligible for services. As a result there are unmet needs throughout the country. AAAs and Title VI agencies have skillfully managed care for vulnerable aging populations by maximizing private and public resources to ensure that essential services are available to millions of minority, frail and low-income older persons in need of comprehensive long-term care. However, as the aging population continues to grow — with more people living longer but facing chronic illness and frailty — the aging network will increasingly be unable to meet the demands for care without significant funding increases. This year, the President's budget request for FY 2003 includes \$1.34 billion in funding to AoA for OAA programs, an overall decrease of \$8 million from last year.

## Policy Recommendations

The necessity for increased OAA funding will only continue to grow with the coming retirement of 77 million baby boomers and the demand for long-term care expected to more than double by 2030. Significant increases in federal appropriations are crucial to assure the availability of OAA programs and services and enhance the ability of older Americans to live with maximum independence.

### **n4a urges policymakers to:**

- **Increase funding for all OAA programs and services by a minimum of 10% above the FY 2002 levels;**
- **Double the initial \$125 million appropriation for the NFCSP to ensure that the much-needed benefits this vital program provides reach thousands more caregivers and their families;**
- **Ensure that the OAA is reauthorized on time when the current authorization expires in 2005, allowing for a seamless transition and avoiding a lapse in authorized funding which will be more important than ever as the elderly population and demand for services continue to skyrocket;**
- **Maintain and enhance the flexibility of the OAA to enable AAAs and Title VI agencies to most appropriately and effectively respond to the specific needs of diverse populations of older adults in their communities;**
- **Provide staff and technology resources within the aging network to track older adults and their caregivers together as they move through the home and community-based care system; and**
- **Encourage the AoA to begin planning for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging immediately and ensure that national aging advocacy groups have ample opportunity to provide input on the agenda and conference objectives.**