

Call to Action

FOR AN AGING NATION

EVERY YEAR, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and provides a voice in the nation's capital for the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, develops a set of top policy priorities to guide our legislative and administrative advocacy efforts. Due to their targeted nature, these priorities, however, do not encompass the full breadth of policy issues that we believe are critically important to older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers.

We believe it is essential that government leaders and advocates at all levels understand the massive demographic shift currently underway, as it will affect every aspect of our collective national experience. The policy changes made now will have deep and long-lasting implications for tens of millions of older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers.

Demographics demand and must drive federal focus on policies that support older adults and their caregivers. The Trump Administration and Congress are facing the steep slope of an unprecedented and

long-term shift in the composition of our country's population ushered in by the maturing of America's baby boomer generation. Every day, 10,000 boomers turn age 65, or nearly 10 million in the next three years. By 2030, 73 million—or one in five—people in America will be age 65 or older.

This historic demographic shift is already evident in many regions of the U.S., including rural areas, where ratios of older adults far exceed the current national average and available services are unable to keep pace with the growing need. By

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2035, all communities must be prepared to address these realities when, for the first time in our nation's history, the population of adults age 60 and older will outnumber people younger than 20.

These demographic milestones are not simply blips on the U.S. Census radar. They are mile-markers on a longer road toward a significantly older nation. It is critical that lawmakers at all levels of government recognize that, unlike at any other point in our history, demographics must drive a dedicated approach to promote cost-effective policies that meet a growing need for services while preserving fiscal stability.

KEY Aging Principles

As lawmakers develop policy proposals that will affect older adults, caregivers and their access to services at home and in the community, we hope their efforts will reflect the following principles:

People want to age safely in their homes and communities. Policy solutions must increase availability of, access to and efficacy of social services that support the cost-effective aging options people most want. *SEE “Enable Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 3 and “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging Services” on page 9.*

Enabling aging in place is essential to our economic success. If we don’t embrace cost-effective, community-based solutions now, the coming demographic shifts will strain government and individual finances. *SEE “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging Services” on page 9.*

Health happens at home and in the community. Leaders must recognize the importance of addressing the social determinants of health through community interventions. We also must protect the integrity of key benefits programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. *SEE “Improve Health and Lower Costs through Community Interventions” on page 13.*

Accomplishing these goals will require that our nation rethink aging. There is tremendous potential in the massive demographic shift facing the country. Policymakers must also commit to promoting the value inherent in an aging population and rejecting embedded ageism in society.

We are only as strong as our caregivers. We must recognize the critical importance of caregivers by building on current caregiver support programs for this essential informal workforce. *SEE “Enable Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 3 and “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging Services” on page 9.*

Community infrastructure is a critical component of healthy aging. In addition to supportive services, the ability of older adults to age in place depends on access to community infrastructure, including housing, transportation and public buildings/facilities, as well as a trained and adequate workforce. *SEE “Enable Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 3 and “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging Services” on page 9.*