Meeting Diverse Needs to Help Older Adults Stay in the Community

Title III B Services Are OAA’s Best-Kept Secret, but Funding Falls Short of Need

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the cornerstone of the nation’s non-Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) system, providing older adults and their caregivers with the supports they need to age with health, dignity and independence in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Essential to the OAA’s ability to support seniors and caregivers are the many home and community-based services authorized in Title III, Part B of the OAA, which ensures that AAAs can meet the individual needs of older adults and their caregivers in the community.

The funding for services provided through Title III B is flexible, allowing agencies to develop programming to reflect community needs and provide tailored supports for older adults. There are up to 25 authorized services that local agencies can fund through Title III B, but the most common services are information and referral (e.g., hotlines to help people find local services and resources), case management, in-home care, transportation, adult day care, chore services and legal services. Title III B services are a lifeline for older adults living in the community, and also preserve access to other OAA services—for example, III B-funded transportation services ensure that older adults can reach congregate meal sites.

Yet funding for III B continues to lag behind the population growth and need for these services. To simply begin restoring the capacity of these critical services to what they were a decade ago, n4a is requesting a 20 percent funding increase for FY 2020. A total allocation for Title III B of $462 million will be an important first step in reversing funding erosion following devastating sequester cuts in FY 2013 and subsequent stagnation. The effect of underfunding Title III B undermines agencies’ ability to help their clients age at home and in the community and, ultimately, costs taxpayers money. When seniors are healthier, Medicare saves money; when frail older adults receive in-home services that prevent or delay nursing home admission, Medicaid saves money. The demand for and cost of providing services increases significantly each year as the population of older adults continues to grow, therefore Congress must continue to grow its investment in III B services.

OAA III B Helps Older Adults Access Vital OAA Services

A 69-year-old man with dementia who has had multiple surgeries lives with his wife. He needs assistance with bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring and walking. His wife helps with all these activities of daily living along with his medication management and all other household tasks. Since her brother, who has an intellectual disability and is unsteady on his feet, recently moved in, she has become a caregiver to both men. OAA home-delivered meals, funded through OAA Title III C, ensure that all three older adults are receiving the nutrition they need. However, OAA Title III B pays for the transportation services needed to deliver those meals.

Without III B funding, this family would not receive the fresh, nutritious meals they need to maintain health and independence. Title III B services have also provided education, information and referrals to other supportive services needed to prevent caregiver burnout and keep everyone safe and together in their home.

OAA III B Helps Veterans

A 92-year-old veteran lost his wife of 68 years. With the loss of her Social Security income, his adjusted budget left very little money for necessities, such as food and electricity, after he paid his monthly rent. First, a III B-funded case manager assessed his needs and helped him apply for a VA pension, which greatly helped him make ends meet. In addition, the case manager lined up III B-funded services, such as an in-home aide to perform light housekeeping duties and take him shopping for weekly groceries; a medical alert device to ensure his safety; and a replacement refrigerator when his broke down. She also connected him to a community program that made minor repairs to his home, to keep it safe for him to live in.

All of this has enabled this gentleman to stay living independently in his own home, and has helped him avoid nursing home placement.
OAA Title III B ensures that local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) can meet the individual needs of older adults and caregivers in the community.

One local Area Agency on Aging provided Title III B-funded emergency home repairs to six older households in the county. All of the homes needed either repairs to or replacement of the furnace during the frigid winter months and during record low temperatures. By using Title III B dollars in this flexible way, the local AAA was able to meet their clients’ urgent needs, restore their homes to safety, and keep these older adults healthy and living independently.

During the Toledo water crisis, hundreds of homebound older adults worried about how they were going to get their next drink of water. In response, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers assembled and delivered 1,000 emergency kits with shelf-stable meals, water and safety items to hundreds of homebound older adults during the water crisis. The local AAA drew upon Title III B funds to help fund this effort, including paying for transportation costs in the delivery of the emergency kits.

Many health and wellness activities at local senior centers are funded by OAA Title III B, with the goal of helping older adults maximize their health, avoid isolation and stay engaged in their communities.

According to one former schoolteacher in Jacksonville, FL, “Retirement meant for me just resting. Resting in a rocking chair, enjoying nothing, doing nothing, seeing nothing. “Well, this wore off very soon. I wanted to do something! I found a nearby community center, but I thought only ‘old people’ went to a senior center. I started slow, doing puzzles and making friends. Now I am crocheting, dancing, doing origami, wood carving, taking an exercise class, plus watching my food intake with knowledge gained from our nutrition classes.

“The center is now my time to give back: I accepted a nomination to the center’s council and I volunteer as the treasurer.”

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