



Reauthorize the Older Americans Act

Strengthen the aging services and supports that make it possible for older adults to age well and safely at home and in the community.

There may be only one near-universal opinion among the nation's 48 million adults who are older than age 65: an estimated 90 percent of them want to maintain their independence by aging well in their own homes and communities, and not in institutions such as nursing homes.¹ This goal is shared by the baby boomers, 10,000 of whom turn 65 every single day, and it is a commitment that both Republicans and Democrats have espoused as an important goal. The good news is that this approach is the most cost-effective for consumers and taxpayers!

A landmark law, the Older Americans Act (OAA), helps millions of aging Americans meet this goal of aging with health, independence and dignity in their homes and communities. The OAA provides funding to states to support community planning and for a range of community-based services for adults age 60 and older who are at risk of losing their independence. Since its enactment, the OAA has been amended 16 times, most recently in 2016.

Because the OAA is up for reauthorization in 2019, Congress should consider thoughtful changes and investments in the Act to better reflect a rapidly growing aging population.

How OAA Works Now

Initially signed into law in 1965 alongside Medicare and Medicaid, the OAA is much smaller and depends on discretionary funding streams (and funding leveraged at state and local levels) rather than the mandatory spending used to fund federal health care programs. This makes OAA especially important to millions of older adults whose incomes are not low enough to make them eligible for Medicaid assistance, but who do not have sufficient financial resources to fully pay for the in-home and community supports they need to remain independent. The OAA not only fills those gaps but, n4a would argue, helps reduce long-term Medicaid expenditures by delaying or preventing individuals from spending down their resources to become eligible for Medicaid long-term care.

Through the network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), each year more than 8 million older Americans receive critical support in the form of in-home personal care, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, disease prevention/health promotion, legal services, elder abuse prevention and intervention, and other social supports essential to maintaining their independence. Additionally, the OAA funds vital

assistance for caregivers of older people through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP, Title III E), which provides grants to AAAs/Title VI aging programs to help family members caring for their ill or disabled loved ones.

The infrastructure and delivery system for these vital services is the nationwide Aging Network—made up of states, 622 Area Agencies on Aging, more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, and tens of thousands of local service providers. The Network, and the Act which created it, were founded on the principle of giving states and local governments flexibility to determine, coordinate and deliver the supports and services that most effectively and efficiently serve older adults and caregivers in their communities.

OAA programs and services save taxpayer dollars by enabling older adults to remain independent and healthy in their own homes, where they prefer to be and where they are less likely to need more costly care paid for by Medicare and Medicaid. By supporting the health of older adults with evidence-based wellness programs, nutrition services, medication management and many more in-home and community options, OAA programs and services save Medicare money. Local OAA programs delay or even prevent the need for higher-level or more expensive (i.e., nursing home) care in Medicaid, postponing impoverishment and eligibility for the means-tested Medicaid long-term care program. Further, when older adults live in assisted living or nursing home facilities, the OAA's long-term care ombudsman program works to protect their rights and well-being.



The wide range of OAA services enables Aging Network entities to connect consumers to service choices that best meet their individual needs. In particular, AAAs/Title VI aging programs play a pivotal role in assessing community needs and developing responsive programs. 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.

In addition to federal investments, AAAs leverage state, local and private funding to build comprehensive systems of home and community-based services in their communities. Surveys from the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) show that every \$1 in federal funding for the OAA leverages nearly an additional \$3 in state, local and private funding. Furthermore, the Aging Network engages hundreds of thousands of volunteers who donate millions of volunteer hours each year, further leveraging public and private investments.

An OAA for an Aging Nation

The reauthorization of the OAA provides an ideal opportunity for Congress to ensure that the Aging Network can meet the needs of the current and future populations of older adults and caregivers.

n4a believes that older adults and caregivers could be better served by programs and services that:

- **Meet Consumers Where They Are:** Protecting the Act's emphasis on the role of local decision-making and flexibility to best meet the needs of older adults and caregivers.
- **Meet Growing Needs by Increasing Investments:** Providing the long-term investments necessary for Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American aging programs to respond to the growing number of older adults who need critical home and community-based services to remain independent, while also meeting the needs of their caregivers.
- **Foster Innovations in Service Delivery:** Allowing for increased innovation, demonstration and research to seed, evaluate and support the best aging services.
- **Ease Administrative Barriers to Increase Access to Services:** Strategic and limited streamlining of several administrative functions would support local agencies' efforts to serve more older adults.

n4a's *Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act* provides greater detail on these and other recommendations for congressional consideration, and we look forward to working with Congress, the Administration and other advocates on additional ideas to update and strengthen this vital Act.