

Stakeholders in an Aging Nation

Every year, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, which represents America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging and provides a voice in the nation's capital for the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, develops a set of its top policy priorities that will guide our legislative and administrative advocacy efforts for the year.

These targeted priorities are based on input received from our members who are directly working with older adults and caregivers in communities around the country. However, these priorities do not encompass the full breadth of policy issues that we and our members believe are critically important to ensure that older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers age with health, dignity and independence.

Every day, 10,000 boomers turn age 65, or nearly 10 million over the next three years. By 2030, 73 million—or one in five—people in America will be age 65 or older. By 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.

We are all stakeholders in an aging nation. Therefore, government leaders and advocates at all levels must understand how the massive demographic shift is shaping every aspect of our collective national experience. Today's policy decisions about how we support older adults and their caregivers will have direct and long-lasting implications for all of us for decades to come.

Demographics demand and must drive a federal focus on policies that support older adults and their caregivers.

In meeting this demand, there are inherent opportunities and responsibilities to work collectively to bridge political, generational and stakeholder divides. Preparing for our demographic destiny requires solutions that leverage our existing national assets and infrastructure to serve an aging population with policy and investment innovations that promote access to vital community-based services.

Policy Solutions Should Reflect Key Aging Principles

As lawmakers develop policy proposals that will affect older adults' 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 the availability of and access to social services that support the cost-effective aging options people most want and need.

See “Reauthorize the Older Americans Act” on page 3 and “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 5.

Health happens at home and in the community.

Leaders must recognize the importance of addressing the social determinants of health through community interventions, including incorporating innovative models into established programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

See “Improve Health by Addressing the Social Determinants” on page 10.

Enabling aging in place is essential to our collective economic success.

If we don't embrace cost-effective, community-based solutions now, these demographic shifts will strain the finances of governments and individuals.

See “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 5 and “Reauthorize the Older Americans Act” on page 3.

We are only as strong as our caregivers.

We must recognize the critically important role caregivers play by expanding on current caregiver programs that support this essential informal workforce.

See “Reauthorize the Older Americans Act” on page 3 and “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 5.

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 private and public buildings/facilities/spaces, as well as a trained and adequate workforce.

See “Invest in Cost-Effective Aging at Home and in the Community” on page 5.

Accomplishing these goals requires that we face our demographic realities and rethink aging. Not only do we need to find innovative solutions to our challenges, but we must also reject ageist thinking and commit to the value and opportunity that an aging population brings to society.