Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act

Reauthorize and modernize the Older Americans Act (OAA) to meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s seniors. Priority should be given to preserving the Act’s local flexibility; protecting adequate authorization levels; strengthening the Aging Network’s role and capacity in the coordination and provision of long-term services and supports; and improving community preparedness for an aging population.

Older Americans Act (OAA) reauthorization provides an ideal opportunity for Congress to ensure that the Aging Network can meet the needs of current and future populations of older adults and their caregivers. Since its inception in 1965, the OAA has evolved to meet the changing needs and expectations of an aging America. Consequently, the scope of the Act was expanded to better address and support the needs of older adults and their caregivers.

Lack of reauthorization would leave gaps in the services provided by the OAA. Therefore, Congress needs to finalize reauthorization in 2015.

n4a believes this reauthorization should assist our nation’s communities in meeting the challenges and opportunities of the “age wave.” To do so effectively, OAA reauthorization should, at a minimum, embrace the following four recommendations. (For more on these and n4a’s other proposals, see n4a’s Recommendations for the 2011 Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.)

1. Preserve the OAA’s flexibility, person-centered commitment and the major local contribution of aging services in the community. While terminology has changed over time, the OAA has always been fundamentally person-centered and local flexibility is the core OAA philosophy that makes this possible. Any changes to the Act should highlight and build upon local flexibility and the inherent person-centered nature of the OAA’s core philosophy and history.

2. Protect adequate authorization levels for the OAA to ensure that the Aging Network has the necessary resources to effectively serve the projected growth in the numbers of older adults—particularly those age 85 and older (the most frail, vulnerable and in the greatest need of services)—and their caregivers.

The OAA is the major federal categorical social services program for older adults in the United States. For 50 years, it has provided an ideal, well-established, trusted and community-based service infrastructure responsive to the needs of older people and their caregivers. OAA program budgets have yielded a three-to-one return on investment in money leveraged into local service delivery. Even with this success, budgets have eroded as federal funding has been cut by sequestration and dramatically fallen behind the growing population of aging individuals needing services. Severe state budget cuts, federal sequestration and a new era of austerity have exacerbated the problem. As a result, services funded by these programs have lost considerable capacity, causing many older adults in
need to be placed on waiting lists, which adds to their emotional, physical and financial hardships. A much larger federal investment in core OAA services and supports is needed to ensure the Aging Network has the necessary resources to serve current and projected needs. Congress must ensure that future investments in OAA are not limited to current spending, but must be flexible and allowed to grow with the population and the need.

3. **Strengthen the role of the Aging Network to integrate medical and community-based long-term services and supports (LTSS), particularly in order to promote the Aging Network’s role in health (both physical and behavioral health), wellness and care management.**

With the transformation of health care, AAAs and Title VI programs are increasingly playing a stronger and more enhanced role in promoting Medicare preventive services, care transitions, medical home models, options counseling, mental health services and community-based and evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs. It is imperative that the OAA reflects that new reality and continues to promote the development of comprehensive LTSS systems in every state and community.

4. **Strengthen the ability of the Aging Network to improve OAA program performance with capacity-building initiatives.**

We must build the capacity of the Aging Network’s infrastructure to meet the challenges ahead. Strengthening the infrastructure needed to support our aging population requires investment in the Aging Network’s capacity. Enhancing capacity requires investment on multiple fronts, including developing core competencies; effectively tracking program outcomes; performing evaluations; and consistently attending to staff and volunteer development, training and retention. There is a tremendous opportunity in the OAA reauthorization process to address this national priority.

For more information on these proposals and why they should be adopted, as well as additional n4a recommendations, contact n4a policy staff or see n4a’s Recommendations for the 2011 Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.