

NASW Recommendations for the 2015 White House Conference on Aging

Theme: Elder Justice

Submitted June 12, 2015

NASW appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on elder justice for consideration by the 2015 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA). As the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its 132,000 members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.

NASW applauds the Obama administration's focus on elder justice over the past seven years and as part of the 2015 WHCoA. The association's specific comments on this topic, organized in response to the discussion questions on page 6 of the WHCoA Elder Justice policy brief, follow.

How can we increase the public's awareness of elder abuse, neglect, and/or financial exploitation?

Much elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation is invisible, and some older adults and family caregivers may not be able to name their experiences (or those of their family members) as elder mistreatment. Others may be reluctant to seek help, especially when family members or trusted service providers are the perpetrators. Continued and expanded education about the warning signs of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation is essential. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), for which NASW is a [2015 collaborator](#), provides an excellent focal point for such efforts. Yet, ongoing efforts are needed.

The workforce also needs education about elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. One way to increase awareness would be for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal departments and agencies to create elder abuse "101" e-trainings. Such trainings could be made available online and eventually required for employees of all disciplines who provide direct services in federally funded organizations and facilities.

Both the public and the workforce also need to understand the resources available to address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The [Eldercare Locator](#) and the [National Center on Elder Abuse's State Resource Directory](#), for example, provide excellent resource databases for people who are concerned about possible elder mistreatment.

Furthermore, additional steps must be taken to eliminate the ageism that pervades U.S. culture. Deep-seated disrespect for older adults and fears about aging contribute to the devaluing and marginalization of older adults. Such attitudes may contribute to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Which elder justice programs or policies are the most or least effective or potentially duplicative?

NASW advocated for the passage of the Elder Justice Act and values the work done by the Elder Justice Coordinating Council.

Adult Protective Service (APS) workers and long-term care ombudsmen—many of whom are social workers—play integral roles in identifying and addressing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Accordingly, NASW strongly supports two funding requests by the administration:

- \$25 million funding request for elder justice and APS programs in FY 2016
- an additional \$5 million for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program under the Elder Justice Act, previously requested by the President.

NASW also supports the following actions to strengthen the APS and ombudsman programs:

- Reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 2015; preserve funding for OAA programs by ending sequestration and by restoring all FY 2016 OAA programs to pre-sequester FY 2010 funding levels (at a minimum).
- Create a dedicated funding stream for APS to increase APS resources to an adequate level across the country.
- Develop a national APS system based on standardized data collection and a core set of service provision standards and best practices through the Office of Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services within the Administration for Community Living.

What type of potential partnerships could support efforts to prevent and address elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation?

Intergenerational collaboration is essential. Elder justice advocates have natural allies in child welfare advocates and domestic violence activists. Local and state coalitions on elder abuse can bring together such advocates.

Interdisciplinary teams also play an integral role in elder justice. Social workers, with their person-in-environment perspective, are essential members of such teams. Multiple professions and service sectors play key roles in preventing, identifying, and addressing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. At the same time, a workforce that is trained in aging plays an integral role in elder justice. NASW's comments on the WHCoA LTSS policy brief include information and recommendations specific to the eldercare workforce.