

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Issue: Support Increased Funding for the Older Americans Act to Enhance Older Adults' Dignity, Health, and Independence

BACKGROUND

Last year, 2015, marked the 50th anniversary of the enactment of the Older Americans Act (OAA). The OAA funds programs and services that enable older adults to enjoy healthy, productive, and independent lives in their homes and communities. Services authorized by the OAA include, but are not limited to, family caregiver support, health and wellness promotion, job training, long-term care ombudsman, nutrition programs, transportation, tribal assistance programs, and programs to prevent and address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Social workers provide many of these services and have long played leadership roles in the aging network at the local, state, and federal levels.

Over the past five decades, the OAA has evolved to enhance the well-being of older adults and communities. Reauthorization is essential to ensuring that the OAA achieves its mission. Nearly five years after the 2011 expiration of the 2006 OAA reauthorization, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2016 (S. 192) passed both chambers of Congress and was signed into law (P.L. 114-144) by President Obama on April 19, 2016. The law reauthorizes OAA services through 2019. NASW has advocated steadily for OAA reauthorization and applauds Congress for its strong bipartisan support of this important legislation.

At the same time, OAA funding has lagged behind both inflation and population growth for years, and recent cuts to discretionary programs have reduced program funding even further. Increased funding is critical to meet the needs of a 21st-century aging population.

WHY INCREASED FUNDING FOR THE OAA IS NECESSARY

Changing Demographics: The aging both of the U.S. population as a whole and of the Baby Boom generation in particular present social and political implications for both the social work profession and the nation. Proactive policies and approaches are essential to ensure that older adults thrive and remain engaged with their families, communities, and the broader society.¹

New Challenges: As longevity increases and the population ages, the need for housing, economic security, health care (including mental and behavioral health), transportation, advocacy, and additional support services becomes even more relevant. Consider, for example, the following statistics:

- » In 2013, one-third of Medicare beneficiaries aged 65 to 74 reported having at least one functional limitation.² The proportion of beneficiaries with functional limitations increased to one-half for adults 75 to 84, and to nearly three-quarters for people aged 85 and older, with women in all age groups reporting functional limitations more than men.²
- » More than 12 million people currently use long-term services and supports,³ a figure anticipated to more than double by 2050.⁴

POLICY SOLUTIONS

- » NASW urges Congress to continue its strong bipartisan support for the OAA by increasing funding for all OAA titles by at least 12 percent and by removing the threat of budget caps sequestration.

¹ National Association of Social Workers. (2015). *Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statements, 2015–2017* (10th ed., pp. 13–20). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

² Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (2013). *2013 characteristics and perceptions of the Medicare population. Table 2.1. Perceived health and functioning of Medicare beneficiaries, by age and by gender and age, 2013* [Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey data tables]. Retrieved from www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS/Data-Tables-Items/2013CNP.html?DLPage=1&DLEntries=10&DLSort=0&DLSortDir=descending

³ Commission on Long-Term Care. (2013). *Report to the Congress*. Retrieved from <http://ltccommission.org>

⁴ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2013). A short look at long-term care for seniors. *JAMA*, 310, 786. Retrieved from <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1733726>

For more information contact:

Dina Kastner, MSS, MLSP
dkastner@naswdc.org » 202.336.8218