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Agencies

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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Introduction

USAging represents and supports the national network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and advocates for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs that help older adults and people with disabilities live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities.

For 50 years, AAAs have served as the local leaders on aging by planning, developing, funding and implementing local systems of coordinated home and community-based services. AAAs lead local networks of providers to deliver these person-centered services to older adults and—increasingly—to younger adults with disabilities. AAA services include information and referral assistance, in-home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, case management, transportation, legal services and caregiver support/respite and more. AAAs are instrumental in supporting older Americans to live and age where they want to—at home and in the community. As a result, their targeted services help achieve positive health and functional outcomes for older adults, including those with complex care needs.

Older Americans Act (OAA) Title VI Native American Aging Programs are a primary authority for funding aging services in Indian Country, where elders are the poorest in the nation. OAA Title VI Part A largely provides nutrition services but also provides wrap-around supportive services such as those found in OAA III B. OAA Title VI Part C funds family caregiver support programs for those caring for older adults, as well as older adults caring for adult children with disabilities. These services are intended to supplement the overall OAA programs and services by giving tribes added resources to respond to the most urgent needs of older adults in Indian Country.

America's Aging Population

According to US Census Data, in 2019, 16 percent of—or 54.1 million Americans—were 65 or older. With an estimated 10,000 people turning 65 each day, by 2040, an estimated 80.8 million—or one in five Americans—will be 65 or older, a full 21.8 percent of the population.ⁱ And by 2034, older adults are expected to outnumber children under 18 for the first time in history.ⁱⁱ The aging population is also becoming more diverse; according to the 2020 Profile of Older Americans published by the Administration for Community Living in 2021, “between 2020 and 2040, the white (not Hispanic) population age 65 and older is projected to increase by 26% compared to 105% for older racial and ethnic minority populations.ⁱⁱⁱ Among this rapidly growing and diverse demographic cohort, there is an overwhelming desire to age at home rather than in institutional settings.^{iv}

Investing in Older Americans Act Programs and Services

One of the critical ways to address and invest in the most cost-effective solutions to problems created by this major change is to increase support for the Older Americans Act (OAA). Each year, through the OAA, nearly 11 million older Americans receive critical support from the nationwide Aging Network—consisting of the federal U.S. Administration on Aging, 56 State Units on Aging, 617 Area Agencies on Aging, more than 280 Title VI Native American Aging Programs, and tens of thousands of local service providers.

The OAA was 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. The OAA is the cornerstone of the nation’s non-Medicaid home and home and community-based services (HCBS) provision. The Aging Network supports older Americans through the delivery of a range of services including in-home personal care, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, disease

prevention/health promotion, legal services, elder abuse prevention and intervention, and other supports.^v

The OAA's Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) also supports family caregivers by offering support through training, respite, support groups and other programs for those who care for friends and family members as they age. The NFCSP funds local AAAs that assist older caregivers and family members caring for older loved ones by offering a range of in-demand supports to family caregivers in every community. Steady and sustained increases are needed for this modest federal program that supports the 41.8 million caregivers for people age 50 and older^{vi} and could prevent billions in more expensive institutional care costs that rely on taxpayer funding. **Appropriators must recognize that the foundational capacity of these programs must be dramatically increased to meet the ongoing and rising need that exists due to the rapidly aging population.**

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the Aging Network has served more older adults than ever before with life-saving assistance thanks to federal emergency relief funds. While US Aging consistently supports increased annual funding for *all* titles of the OAA, it is also vital that funding increases are not wholly concentrated in one title of the Act. **OAA Title III B Supportive Services include most of the other services that older adults and their caregivers need, such as in-home assistance, transportation, respite care, home modifications and repairs, and access to other services and resources** via the AAA's Information and Referral/Assistance system—all of which are funded under Title III B. The beauty of the OAA is that it allows states and local agencies to provide services that people need locally; however, that requires a well-balanced approach to federal funding and maximum local flexibility.

The critical flexibility of this funding stream gives AAAs greater means to meet the needs of older adults at home and in the community, thereby eliminating the need for more expensive nursing home care—which usually leads to impoverishment and a subsequent need to rely on Medicaid to meet critical health care needs. The flexibility of OAA Title III B also allows AAAs to meet new and emerging needs in their communities, such as wellness checks for homebound older adults, activities to help older adults stay socially engaged and vaccine outreach and assistance. However, years of eroded funding prior to COVID-19 have resulted in local agencies losing ground in their ability to provide critical Title III B Supportive Services. **Appropriators must recognize that the foundational capacity of all OAA programs must be dramatically increased to meet the ongoing and rising need that exists due to the rapidly aging population.**

Specifically, USAging urges Congress to: **Double OAA Title III B Supportive Services** over FY 2023 levels in FY 2024, for a funding level of \$820 million; double funding for Title VI over FY 2023 in FY 2024 to reach at least \$76.5 million for Part A (nutrition and supportive services) and \$24 million for Part C (family caregiver support); for FY 2024, we encourage Congress to double-over-FY 2023 its appropriations for the **OAA Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program** to reach \$410 million, the only national program supporting the family caregivers of older adults who provide the lion's share of long-term care in this country.

The time now has come for Congress to recognize the value of the Older Americans Act as the critical non-Medicaid HCBS resource that meets these goals and invest accordingly. Thank you for the opportunity to share our members' realities and the needs of the older adults and caregivers they serve.

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- ⁱ U.S. Administration for Community Living, 2020 Profile of Older Americans, https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/aging%20and%20Disability%20In%20America/2020Profileolderamericans.final_.pdf.
- ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau, *2017 National Population Projections Tables: Main Series*, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Administration for Community Living, 2020 Profile of Older Americans, https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/aging%20and%20Disability%20In%20America/2020Profileolderamericans.final_.pdf.
- ^{iv} Joanne Binette and Kerri Vasold, *2018 Home and Community Preferences: A National Survey of Adults Age 18-Plus*, AARP Livable Communities, <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/community/info-2018/2018-home-community-preference.html>.
- ^v U.S. Administration for Community Living, Aging, Independence, and Disability (AGID) Program Data Portal, *Data-at-a-Glance (SPR)*, <https://agid.acl.gov/DataGlance/SPR/>.
- ^{vi} AARP Family Caregiving, *Caregiving in the U.S.*, https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AARP1316_ExecSum_CaregivingintheUS_508.pdf.