



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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## **TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO HOUSE FINANCE HHS SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
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Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, I am Beth Kowalczyk, Chief Policy Officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging. I am here to share our association's budget priorities with you.

Area Agencies on Aging were established in 1973 by the Older Americans Act to respond to the needs of adults aged 60 and older in every local community. There are over 600 Area Agencies on Aging across the country. The Older Americans Act grants Area Agencies on Aging the flexibility to ensure that communities' local needs and preferences are taken into consideration and that the resulting delivery system is tailored to local communities. By providing options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services, programming, and living arrangements that suit them best, Area Agencies on Aging make it possible for older adults to thrive in their homes and communities. This makes our communities stronger.

Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging are mission-driven, primarily not-for-profit, organizations that operate a complex service delivery system with federal, state, local and private funding that successfully develops, coordinates and administers aging services.

The Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a), a nonprofit organization, is a statewide network of agencies that provide services for older adults, people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, as well as advocate on their behalf. The Association addresses issues that have an impact on the aging and disability network, provides services to members, serves as a collective voice for Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).  
Equal Opportunity Employer/Provider

The Governor's budget proposes unprecedented investments to support older adults that are in line with our Association's budget priorities, which are attached to this testimony. Our members will be coming before you to provide additional testimony that speaks directly to the needs of older adults in their communities and the people and organizations that serve them.

Today I would just like to offer a few highlights.

Our top priority should be no surprise – we must ensure equal access to home care with increased reimbursement rates and a competitive wage. We support the Administration's unprecedented proposal to substantially increase provider reimbursement rates.

We are currently facing a workforce shortage that has resulted in at least 4500 people statewide enrolled in Area Agency on Aging programs waiting for home care services. In the Medicaid HCBS PASSPORT waiver for older adults, more than 2000 individuals are waiting for personal care services.

Different rates and requirements for similar work in Medicaid programs results in a competition for a small number of workers and an imbalance in the system.

Over the past several months, the Area Agencies on Aging have organized home care roundtables across the state to give a voice to the providers, caregivers, direct care workers and individuals we serve. Home care "made the difference" for one participant "feeling connected and less isolated." Another stated that her worker was "an angel on earth." A provider declared that their mission was "helping people help people."

Key themes emerged from the roundtables, with low reimbursement rates resulting in an inability to pay a competitive wage as the number one concern. Providers shared that they have tried numerous retention and recruitment strategies with little success; that they lose potential caregivers to other providers, programs and industries that pay much more; that the reimbursement rate is insufficient to cover the cost to provide service, and that workers are facing a benefits cliff where small wage increases will mean they lose critical work supports.

In addition to increased reimbursement rates, we propose initiatives that can make an immediate impact and remove potential barriers, including streamlined housekeeping, provider engagement coaches and removing barriers for families and friends to provide participant-directed care.

Additionally, the Area Agencies on Aging are also impacted by workforce challenges. To ensure equal access to home care, we are advocating that PASSPORT operating and case management budgets be reflective of current environmental factors and increased complexities in care.

We also are supportive of additional investments supporting older adults in the community. I would like to highlight the increase proposed by the administration in the ODA budget for Senior Community Services as well as additional one-time "Healthy Aging" grants to support older adults in their communities with interventions that can delay and divert from Medicaid. Both proposals are consistent with the longstanding mission of the Area Agencies on Aging to identify and address local needs for older adults in their communities.

Our association looks forward to continued conversations about these priorities. With your support, we can all work together to make Ohio the best state in the nation in which to age.



# FY24 & FY25 BUDGET PRIORITIES



**All Ohioans deserve the right to live healthy, engaged and secure lives, and to be able to age with dignity and autonomy. We need bold action so that Ohio will be the best place to age in the nation.**

## **EQUAL ACCESS TO HOME CARE:**

**Eliminate waiting lists, ensure parity across programs, and build capacity to meet growing need for home care for older adults and people with disabilities in Ohio.**

## **SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY:**

**Enact policies and support programs that enable us all to continue to be active members of our communities and have options as we age.**





# Ensure continuing and future capacity of the Area Agencies on Aging to meet the needs of older adults in their communities.

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## BUDGET REQUESTS



1

### ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO HOME CARE

- **Rate and Wage Increases:** \$20/hour wage for the direct care workforce with at least a 50% increase in the reimbursement rate for PASSPORT(Aging) and Ohio Home Care (Medicaid) home care providers, to ensure parity across programs for older adults and people with disabilities in parity with other parts of the care continuum.
- **Streamlined Housekeeping:** provide voucher or service for at least one housecleaning a month, laundry service and grocery delivery.
- **Provider Engagement Coach:** include at least an additional \$1 million per year, estimated \$40,000 per year per AAA, for Area Agencies on Aging to hire provider engagement coaches to link, assist and coach participants and providers (particularly participant-directed) to successful certification and timely delivery of home and community-based services.
- **Remove barriers:** remove potential recruitment barriers by excluding participant-directed providers (usually family or friends) from home care licensure requirement.
- **Support Area Agencies on Aging:** Area Agencies on Aging have administered the PASSPORT waiver for over 30 years. The cost of delivering services continues to increase and the need grows but resources have not been adjusted to enable the AAAs to meet the need. Review and adjust case management and operating funding based on current environmental factors and increased complex need.

2

### SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Adult Day Services:** support rate increases and initiatives to increase capacity.
- **Senior Community Services/Healthy Aging:** support additional funding outside of Medicaid to meet existing and future needs; to address wait lists; delay the need for Medicaid; and to enable the state to draw down additional Older Americans Act ARPA funding. Services can include addressing home repairs and modifications, benefits counseling, elder abuse supportive services, and AAA innovations.
- **Assisted Living Waiver Rate:** support rate increase to encourage more assisted living facilities to accept Medicaid reimbursement as an alternative to nursing home placement.
- **Ohio Housing Trust Fund/Affordable Housing initiatives:** support initiatives that increase access to affordable housing for older adults, home maintenance, and home modifications.
- **Adult Protective Services:** support proposed additional \$4 million per year to allow for each county to receive at least \$80,000 for staff and to support additional services.