



HB 96 Testimony - Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

March 5, 2025

Jeremy Dias

BoldAge PACE

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jeremy Dias, Executive Director for the Ohio Market at BoldAge PACE. BoldAge PACE is a Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) operator in Ohio and in five other states across the country. BoldAge PACE was honored to be selected to provide PACE services in Franklin, Lucas, and Montgomery Counties through a competitive RFP process run by the Ohio Department of Aging. This was made possible through the Ohio General Assembly's passage of House Bill 45 in 2022, which expanded the program to a number of unserved counties. Our sites are under development with our first program set to open in Summer 2025 and other sites throughout this year and into 2026.

As you may be aware, PACE is a comprehensive, community-based care model that serves frail older adults who require nursing home level-of-care. PACE focuses on the high-touch high-need population of dual eligibles (Medicare and Medicaid) and allows these individuals to live independently in their homes and communities for as long as possible while receiving all necessary healthcare and social services. The program integrates medical, dental, vision, pharmacy, social through an adult day health center, and long-term care services in a way that prioritizes the individual's needs, preferences, and quality of life. Without a service such as PACE, these individuals would likely require a long-term care facility, custodial care, or another more expensive care option that requires them to move from their homes. PACE comes at a large cost savings to the state when compared to other options such as Medicaid-managed plans or other traditional Medicaid-funded services.

Since its implementation in Ohio, PACE has demonstrated significant successes in improving care outcomes, reducing hospitalizations, and lowering healthcare costs to the state. PACE is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults with chronic conditions,

who often face multiple barriers to accessing healthcare. By offering a comprehensive package of services that include primary care, specialized medical care, prescription medications, transportation, rehabilitation services, and social supports, PACE has proven to reduce the burden on our state's hospital systems and emergency departments and helping to prevent unnecessary institutionalization. PACE not only improves their quality of life, but also provides peace of mind to families who are often challenged by the complexities of caring for an aging loved one.

Enrollment issues

Enrollment into the PACE program can be a long process under the current system. After an initial assessment by the PACE organization, PACE applicants who are not already enrolled in Medicaid must then work with their County Job & Family Services offices which are responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility. This process involves verifying income, assets, and other financial factors to confirm that the applicant meets Ohio's Medicaid requirements. Additionally, the Ohio Department of Aging works with PACE organizations to assess whether the applicant meets the required nursing home level-of-care based on the initial assessment done by the PACE Registered Nurse or PACE Social Worker.

Pending approval and enrollment decisions by the PACE organization, Medicaid, and Medicare, the participant then begins their care plan development at the start of the next enrollment month; this is traditionally on the first after final determinations and agreement is signed by the participant or their designated representative. At this point, the PACE organization will manage all Medicare and Medicaid services provided to the participant. The PACE care team will then develop a customized care plan for the participant within the first 30 days of enrollment to cover medical, dental, vision, social, and supportive services.

The total timeline for this enrollment process is anywhere from 6-8 weeks and sometimes longer if there is an appeals process. For someone who meets nursing home level of care and has major health care needs, this process is burdensome and lengthy. ~~too long~~. For some programs and services, Medicaid allows services to begin immediately for certain individuals who appear to meet eligibility criteria while their full application is being processed.

Currently, PACE cannot begin services until the lengthy enrollment process is complete, even if it is very clear to the PACE organization that the potential participant will be deemed eligible. We recommend the following amendments to the budget to: Allow potential PACE participants to receive services immediately, at the risk of the PACE organization, who

would not be paid if the individuals are later determined ineligible. This policy change comes at no cost to the state but would make a meaningful impact for potential PACE participants who would benefit from the program. Additionally, PACE is required by federal regulation to reimburse less than the cost of what otherwise would have been paid by the state's fee for service Medicaid program, which would increase the cost savings benefit of PACE in Ohio.

Future Expansion

As I stated, the PACE model was expanded via House Bill 45 in 2022 and through the Ohio Department of Aging's Request for Proposals process concluding in 2023; this awarded expansion sites in various counties around the state. With PACE development surging in Ohio and neighboring states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, and Kentucky, providers interested in further developing PACE and reaching more unserved counties want the chance to do more here in Ohio.

Current and prospective PACE providers like BoldAge PACE respectfully request the issuance of another RFP for further expansion of the program no later than July 1, 2026. The 2022 expansion did take great strides to increase access to PACE with many unserved areas still throughout the state who would greatly benefit from this cost-effective care model proven to reduce acute health needs and improve participant health. There would not need to be any funding attached to this next round of expansion; we are simply asking for the ability to expand.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider expanding the PACE program in Ohio and allowing for this presumptive eligibility of participants, at the financial risk of providers. These changes can help us serve more of our most vulnerable citizens and improve the overall health and well-being of Ohio's aging population. Expanding PACE is an investment in the health and dignity of our seniors, the well-being of their families, and the financial sustainability of our state's healthcare system.

I am grateful for your time and consideration of this important issue. I am available to answer any questions and look forward to working with you to ensure that PACE continues to grow and meet the needs of Ohio's aging population.