



## **HB 96 Testimony - Ohio House Finance Committee**

March 11, 2025

Ann Conn

McGregor PACE

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ann Conn, and I am the President/CEO of the McGregor Foundation, located in Cuyahoga County. In addition to operating Ohio's only PACE program, McGregor has served older adults since 1877 through a range of care options from independent living to end-of-life care.

As you've heard in the past through testimony from our organization and other PACE advocates, PACE provides comprehensive medical and social services to certain frail older adults living in the community, with the program assuming full financial risk for all primary, acute, and long-term care services. McGregor PACE was honored to be selected to provide PACE services in Lorain and Summit 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. McGregor PACE has operated in Cuyahoga County since 2010, adding Lorain in July 2024, and Summit County in May.

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 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.

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. 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 at the beginning of the month following application, 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 McGregor 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.