



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

## Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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### TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO HOUSE MEDICAID COMMITTEE

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Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
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Chair Gross, Vice Chair Barnhorst, Ranking Member Baker, and members of the Medicaid Committee, I am Beth Kowalczyk, Chief Executive Officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging.



Area Agencies on Aging were established in the 1970s 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 considered, 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 and this makes our communities stronger.

Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) have over 40 years of experience serving our communities, and over 30 years operating the PASSPORT HCBS waiver program. They administer and provide case management for the PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and Ohio Home Care waiver programs, waiver service coordination for MyCare Ohio, and administer Older Americans Act and Senior Community Services programs as well as a variety of county levies and other federal, state and local programs. The Area Agencies on Aging answer an estimated 300,000 requests for information and referrals annually, and experienced screeners and assessors evaluate individual and family needs and link older

Ohioans to cost-effective in-home and community-based programs where they live. They have been the champions of promoting and expanding the use of home and community-based services for over 40 years, saving the state an estimated \$12 billion in institutional care.

## **Budget Priorities**

We support the Governor's proposed budget investments supporting older adults and the Aging Network. All Ohioans deserve the right to live healthy, engaged and secure lives, and to be able to age with dignity and autonomy.

### **Medicaid:**

**Provider Rates:** Increased reimbursement rates for providers in the last biennial budget have led to increased wages and benefits for direct care workers, better hiring and retention rates, reduced wait lists and more consumers receiving the services they need. The sustainability and regular review of these rates moving forward will be crucial to continue to strengthen and build the capacity of the aging network so all Ohioans can continue to choose how they live as they age. We support a mechanism by which the state regularly reviews provider payment rates to ensure access to services and more closely reflects the true cost of care.

**Personal Needs Allowance:** We also support the Department of Aging's proposed increase in the personal needs allowance (PNA) from \$50 per month to \$100 per month. This increase will help individuals pay for personal and ancillary expenses not covered by Medicaid like toiletries, haircuts, and clothing; and social and recreational activities like going out to eat with family members, trips to the movies or other items or services that must be purchased by the individual. Increasing the PNA reduces financial stress and allows individuals to better manage their care needs and more fully participate in community activities.

**Waiver Programs:** PASSPORT and Assisted Living are Medicaid Home and Community – Based (HCBS) waiver programs that have successfully enabled thousands of older Ohioans to thrive in their homes and communities each year. We support the Governor's request for sustained support for the PASSPORT and Assisted Living waivers, and the Area Agencies on Aging that administer them.

### **Aging:**

**Senior Community Services Program (GRF 490411):** To continue upon the profound outcomes of the Healthy Aging grants and meet the growing need, **we request that the General Assembly invest in older adults and local communities by increasing the Senior Community Services Program by \$10 million per fiscal year.**

The federally funded Older Americans Act (OAA), and the state's Senior Community Services program (the state match for the Older Americans Act), are the primary programs outside of Medicaid administered by the Area Agencies on Aging that support healthy aging for Ohioans. These programs fund lower cost and less intensive interventions that can enable older Ohioans to remain in their homes and communities and delay their need for more costly Medicaid services and nursing home placement.

The Senior Community Services Program provides flexible, community-driven funding to Area Agencies on Aging for non-Medicaid funded services like home modifications and repairs, transportation, meals, housing assistance, personal care, and other types of supports that prevent social isolation.

At its peak in the early 2000's the Senior Community Services Program was funded at \$16 million per year but was cut severely during the recession. While funding has gradually been restored, with workforce challenges, the rising cost of providing services and increasing numbers of older adults with more complex needs, modest funding increases have not filled the gaps that remain. That is why we are seeking to double the current funding level (\$10 million per year) in this budget.

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.