

Issue Brief
Older Americans Act Reauthorization

NCOA urges Congress to continue the tradition of bipartisan and timely reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. Senators and Representatives should publicly express their support for protecting and strengthening the OAA to their constituents and the larger aging services community by contributing statements to the OAA Support Drive (www.OneAway.org/SupportOAA).

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the backbone of services to America's aging population. First enacted in 1965, the OAA helps seniors to stay independent and healthy through a wide range of services and programs, including: Meals on Wheels, congregate meals, senior center services, transportation, support for family caregivers, home and community services, health promotion and disease prevention, civic engagement, and community service employment for low-income older workers. The Act has made an enormous positive difference in the lives of millions of older Americans. It is the primary vehicle for organizing and delivering community-based services that provide for basic human needs.

Reauthorization provides an opportunity to update and modernize the OAA to better serve the rapidly growing number of older Americans, and strengthen the ability of the Act to address the pressing challenges that threaten the independence, health and economic security of seniors in need.

- The first of the Baby Boomers turned 65 last year and almost 10,000 more are reaching this milestone each day.
- Over 1 in 3 seniors age 65+ are economically insecure, with incomes below \$22,000. Despite Social Security and Medicare, these older adults struggle each day with rising housing and health care bills, inadequate nutrition, lack of access to transportation, diminished savings, and job loss
- Approximately 91% of older adults have at least one chronic disease, and 73% have at least two. Chronic diseases account for 75% of the money our nation spends on health care, yet only 1% of health dollars are spent on public efforts to improve overall health.

Reauthorization should strengthen the OAA now to reflect lessons learned about innovative programs and strategies, and also enhance research, demonstration, and technical assistance that will support development and adoption of evidence-based approaches to address the growing concerns of our nation's seniors.

Reauthorization Background:

Congress adopted a bipartisan OAA reauthorization in 2006, responding to the number one priority identified by delegates to the once-in-a-decade White House Conference on Aging, most of whom were appointed by members of Congress and governors. The 2006 reauthorization modernized and strengthened the Act in numerous ways and adding important new initiatives. The OAA expired at the end of FY 2011.

Sen. Sanders (I-VT), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging, has introduced S. 2037, Older Americans Act Amendments of 2012, and is expected to merge his legislation with the various Senate bills that have been introduced to create a comprehensive reauthorization package for the Committee to mark up later this year.

The NCOA reauthorization priorities included in Chairman Sanders' bill include:

- Defining economic security and establishing it as a goal of the OAA
- Updating the definition of economic need and the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E)
- Investing in modern senior centers, including through a senior center modernization fund
- Requiring that health promotion and disease prevention initiatives be evidence-based
- Enhancing SCSEP and exploring a path to transfer the program to the Administration on Aging (AoA)

S. 2037 also recognizes that the most significant reason the OAA has not reached its full potential has been a lack of resources. To address this, the legislation calls for increases in four key areas of the OAA: (1) Supportive Services, (2) Senior Nutrition, (3) Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and (4) SCSEP.

NCOA also applauds the leadership of other members of Congress who have championed OAA legislation:

- S. 1744, Guardian Accountability and Senior Protection Act, introduced by Sen. Klobuchar (D-MN)
- S. 1750, Home Care Consumer Bill of Rights Act, introduced by Sen. Franken (D-MN)
- S. 1818, Strengthening Services for America's Seniors Act, introduced by Sen. Kohl (D-WI)
- S. 1982, Improving Care for Vulnerable Older Citizens through Workforce Advancement Act of 2011, introduced by Sen. Casey (D-PA)
- S. 2077, Elder Protection and Abuse Prevention Act, introduced by Sen. Blumenthal (D-CT)
- H.R.2786, Holocaust Survivors Assistance Act of 2011, introduced by Rep. Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)
- H.R.3749, Expanding Opportunities for Older Americans Act of 2011, introduced by Rep. Richardson (D-CA)

Major OAA Programs:

- ***Supportive Services and Senior Centers (Title III-B)*** – Services that enable older persons to live independently in their own homes and communities, rather than enter institutions. The most frequently provided services are home health, personal care and transportation. Resources are also authorized for senior centers.
- ***Nutrition Services (Title III-C)*** – Congregate and home-delivered meal programs which improve the health and quality of life for millions of seniors.
- ***Preventive Health (Title III-D)*** – Health promotion and disease prevention programs to improve health and manage chronic disease to enhance quality of life, reduce health care costs and promote independence.
- ***National Family Caregiver Support Program (Title III-E)*** – Services to empower and help ease the burdens of caregivers, including respite care, counseling and supplemental services.
- ***Activities for Health, Independence, and Longevity (Title IV)*** – Research and demonstration activities to build the evidence base for successful aging services programs and strategies and to test innovative practices to support older adults' economic security, health and long-term care.
- ***Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) (Title V)*** – The only employment and training program for low-income older workers, which promotes economic security while strengthening communities through community service job placements.
- ***Native American aging programs (Title IV)*** – Nutrition and family support services to Native American (including Native Alaskan and Hawaiian) elders, who are among the most economically disadvantaged elderly minority in the nation.
- ***Vulnerable Elder Rights Protection (Title VII)*** – Long-Term Care Ombudsman, State legal assistance, and elder abuse prevention programs which advocate for residents of long-term care facilities and raise public awareness and coordinate activities to identify and prevent elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Congressional staff can also refer to the following CRS report for additional OAA information:

- RL33880: *Funding for the Older Americans Act and Other Administration on Aging Programs*, Angela Napili, Kirsten J. Colello, January 30, 2012