

NCOA Priorities in LCAO OAA Reauthorization Consensus Document

In April 2011, the 66-member Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) endorsed a consensus document of Older Americans Act (OAA) reauthorization proposals. The following are the priorities of the National Council of Aging which were incorporated in the document, arranged by Titles of the Act:

Title I

Establish economic security as a goal of the Older Americans Act. Define economic security as having the income, resources and services and supports necessary to meet all basic needs, including housing, health care, transportation, food, miscellaneous essentials and, when necessary, long-term care.

Define advocacy with particular attention to the roles and mandates at the federal, state and local levels. A definition will help to eliminate confusion or misunderstanding about what the Act requires in terms of advocacy, and ensure that there is a consistent degree of advocacy on behalf of and with older Americans across the country.

Title II

Reinforce the role of the Assistant Secretary to provide training and technical assistance, conduct oversight, and disseminate best practices related to the Act's advocacy provisions. Require the Administration to develop ways to capture and evaluate advocacy activities at the federal, state and local levels which detail their impact on the lives of older adults and on existing policies and systems to improve the lives of older Americans. Such mechanisms shall be developed in collaboration with stakeholders nationwide and focus on process and outcomes elements that can easily be used by the Aging Network.

Authorize the Assistant Secretary to provide training and technical assistance as well as funding to support the local adoption of person-centered approaches to economic casework.

Strengthen the work and effectiveness of the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Aging to integrate and coordinate federal programs serving older Americans by charging the Committee with creating an inventory of all federal programs aimed at reducing poverty and increasing the economic security of older adults; unifying and coordinating the activities of agencies administering such programs; analyzing federal program effectiveness against a goal of economic security that draws on a concrete measure, using a methodology such as WOW's Elder Economic Security Standard Index; and recommending and drafting the necessary regulatory and legislative changes to increase economic security of vulnerable and economically disadvantaged older adults.

Effective engagement of older volunteers, particularly the baby boomers, can dramatically increase the capacity of the Aging Network. Therefore, we recommend that the OAA:

- transition the Multi-Generational Civic Engagement pilot to a permanent program under Title II and invest in the nationwide adoption of the models and best practices evaluated in recent years;
- develop new roles and opportunities for older volunteers to expand nonprofit services to vulnerable seniors, children and their families;

- authorize AoA to create a national strategy—in collaboration with the Corporation for National and Community Service—to tap older volunteers as a source of social capital to meet critical community needs; and
- fund research on how older volunteers (a) increase capacity for the Aging Network and other nonprofits (b) enhance health and independence for the volunteers, and (c) foster improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Title III

Clarify the importance of the AAA's responsibility to seek information, input and expertise from community-based organizations serving older adults, other service providers under the Act, independent experts and other advocates in the planning and service area when developing the area plan, particularly as it pertains to determining community needs, identifying pressing issues and proposing solutions. The process by which this input is solicited and considered should be as transparent as possible.

Allow State Units on Aging and Area Agencies on Aging, in consultation with the state unit, to use a locally determined measure of economic security to measure economic need and target services in the state and area plans.

Key principles, standards and lessons learned from AoA's *Evidence-Based Disease and Disability Prevention Program* (EBDDP) should be permanently imbedded in the core services of the OAA. Current Title III-D should be strengthened to integrate evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs. Funding levels must be authorized and sufficient to meet the need for these cost-saving and health-boosting programs.

Title IV

The Research and Development capacity at AoA should be strengthened by specifying in the Act that a fully qualified Chief Science Officer be appointed with authority to direct Aging Network–related research, demonstration and evaluation projects based on rigorous scientific standards. Rigorous standards, including peer review by leading scientists for the award and execution of evaluations, research, and program demonstrations are needed for the results to be credible, and thus of benefit to the Aging Network and older adults. Research, evaluations, and demonstrations are needed that show cost savings (such as to Medicare and Medicaid) that would be useful for budget scoring to demonstrate the ability to bend the entitlement cost curve

Important service innovations occur at the community level, but there is insufficient funding and research expertise at that level to translate/validate best practices into evidence-based interventions. An investment in such research can be made through appropriately designed grant programs that relate to the priorities of the OAA and the Aging Network.

Funding should be made available through grant competitions directed to the community level (to AAAs, senior centers and other CBOs) for evidence-based research, evaluations and demonstrations. The grants should be based on partnerships with local universities and community-level Aging Network organizations, and focus on priority areas where innovation is needed. Research/demo agendas should be consistent with state and area plans.

Create a senior center modernization fund to foster senior center innovation, leadership, and capacity-building. Tap into the vast expertise of multipurpose senior centers by expanding their role in state and local needs assessment and planning.

To support the expansion and promulgation of Aging Network person-centered approaches to economic casework, authorize the creation of the National Economic Security Center Demonstration by the Assistant Secretary in cooperation with related Federal agency partners administering relevant economic security programs (DOL, HUD, HHS, SSA, USDA, NeighborWorks, CNS). Funding would be provided to establish local economic security centers, implement new or expand existing economic security casework strategies, provide training and technical assistance, evaluate impact and success, develop and maintain a best practices clearinghouse, and provide web-based decision support and assessment tools.

Title V

Allow the use of pilot and demonstration authority in Section 502(e) to:

- (1) Provide new services for participants as well as extend services to older adults who are low-income but do not qualify for SCSEP;
- (2) Expand the scope of SCSEP to provide a broad range of direct and referred services for seniors who need job training and placement services and income supports by adopting a person-centered approach that includes assessment of need, economic casework, coordination of benefits, and engagement of diverse service providers; and
- (3) Authorize a pilot to test “Sector Strategies” in SCSEP to create employment opportunities and applicable training to place older workers in jobs where local labor market need is identified. Jobs will be created with an emphasis on addressing older worker issues such as requisite physical conditioning, discrimination, workplace culture, flexibility, and job specific skills and employer issues, including recruiting and retaining older workers and redesigning roles for older workers.

Eliminate durational limits for SCSEP. Participants in SCSEP should be allowed to remain on the program rather than be subject to the maximum time extension they would be permitted in the current law. Revise performance requirements to better reflect the population served, including evaluating placement rate rather than entered employment; measuring earnings gain rather than average earnings; and adopting a community service measure that retains an appropriate balance with job placement, reinforces the core purpose of community service in the program and reflects the value of community service rather than the number of hours worked by participants. Amend OAA Sec. 503(g) to ensure that durational limit exits do not negatively affect the evaluation of programs.

Create a competitive grant making process that ensures efficiency, fairness, and minimal disruption to customers and is based on experience and performance. Grantees that meet performance expectations should not have territories disrupted every four years, which results in a decrease in services to older workers, at least for the first full year after competition. Absent unusual circumstances, current or prospective grantees should not be awarded territories for which they have not applied and do not have expertise to serve.

Provide clarification and streamline the law to eliminate the complicated data validation and data collection requirements. Current data collection requirements result in complex procedures, which place an inordinate value on compiling information rather than on customer-focused service delivery. Support the administration of SCSEP through employment and training administrative funds rather than reducing grants to cover the cost of administration.

Title VII

Strengthen the State Legal Assistance Developer Program by requiring each state to have a full-time legal assistance developer (developer); providing that the Assistant Secretary develop, within 12 months, standards for the work and qualifications of developers; and ensuring that the developers are independent from political and other influence to set priorities and address issues as necessary.