

# Policy At A Glance:

## Dignity in Aging Act of 2019 (H.R. 4334)

*Dignity in Aging Act of 2019 reauthorizes the Older Americans Act which funds a wide range of programs to help individuals 60 years and over age independently and with dignity.*

## What is the *Dignity in Aging Act of 2019*?

The *Dignity in Aging Act of 2019* reauthorizes the provisions under the *Older Americans Act (OAA)* of 1965 until fiscal year (FY) 2024. Services and programs under consideration include<sup>1</sup>:

- Support services for caregivers of the elderly
- Informational services such as pension counseling
- Nutritional services such as home-delivered and congregate meals
- Disease prevention and health promotion services
- Community and workforce training regarding elder care
- Elder abuse and neglect prevention services

The bill also establishes several entities and programs to promote independent living and reduce social isolation.<sup>1</sup> OAA services must target “older individuals with greatest economic need and older individuals with greatest social need, with particular attention to low-income minority individuals, older individuals residing in rural areas, low-income individuals, and frail individuals.”<sup>2</sup>

## History

1/4/1965	President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) unveils his Great Society Initiative
7/14/1965	LBJ signs the <i>Older Americans Act (OAA)</i> of 1965 into law
4/19/2016	President Obama signs the <i>OAA Reauthorization Act of 2016</i> into law
9/30/2019	The 2016 <i>OAA Reauthorization Act</i> expires
10/28/2019	House of Representatives passes the <i>Dignity in Aging Act of 2019</i> (H.R. 4334)

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# What is the *Older Americans Act of 1965*?

The *Older Americans Act* (OAA) of 1965 was enacted into law as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society reforms. In addition to OAA, President Johnson's Great Society programs include Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, widely known as food stamps).<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

OAA services help older adults "age in place" in their homes and communities, out of nursing homes and hospitals. To accomplish this, OAA established the federal Administration on Aging, created state level offices on aging, and distributed funding to states to finance supportive services for adults over the age of 60.<sup>8</sup> States, in turn, created Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to address the needs of older individuals at the regional and local levels.<sup>9</sup>

OAA's safety net programs represent 0.05 percent of the entire federal budget.<sup>10</sup> Federal funding for all OAA services was \$2.06 billion in FY 2019.<sup>2</sup>



"Every year, the *Older Americans Act* provides assistance to one out of six adults age 60 and over."<sup>3</sup>



*The Administration on Aging (AoA) – in the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – implements the provisions of the OAA.*

## The Older Americans Act (OAA) Objectives

Through direct funding to states, the OAA seeks to ensure the following for seniors<sup>11</sup>:

- Adequate retirement income
- Best possible physical and mental health
- Suitable and affordable housing
- Employment opportunity
- Pursuit of meaningful civic, cultural, and recreational activities
- Community services which provide social assistance
- Retirement in health, honor, and dignity

# Challenges with the OAA

The Older Americans Act provides assistance to 11 million individuals age 60 and over every year.<sup>3</sup> OAA funds popular programs and supportive services vital to a senior's health, wellbeing, and independence, including adult daycare, Meals on Wheels, the National Family Caregiver Support Program, nutrition education, personal-care assistance, legal services, transportation services to medical appointments, and part-time job opportunities.

In a demographic shift known as a “gray tsunami,” the first of Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, became 65 in 2011 and every day, 10,000 Baby Boomers become 65 years of age.<sup>12</sup> By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 or older and, according to the United States Census Bureau, older people are projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history.<sup>13</sup> Today, roughly 80 percent of seniors have at least one chronic health condition while over 25 million are economically insecure and struggle with housing, inadequate nutrition, access to transportation, and job loss.<sup>14,15</sup>

However, funding for OAA has not kept pace with inflation or the demands of the aging population over the last two decades. Even though OAA program are shown to be

valuable to seniors, OAA funding has only increased an average of 1.1 percent per year from FY 2001 (\$1.68 billion) to FY 2019 (\$2.06 billion).<sup>2</sup> If OAA funding had kept up with inflation, FY 2019 funding would have been \$2.44 billion, \$388 million more than the actual FY 2019 funding.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, according to the Committee on Education & Labor, OAA funding was \$42.95 per senior in 2010. In 2019, the number was \$27.25 per senior.<sup>16</sup> As a result, 83 percent of low-income older Americans who experience food insecurity do not receive any meal services through OAA and two-thirds of older Americans who struggle with daily activities received limited or no home-based care services.<sup>2,16</sup>

## OAA and the Dignity in Aging Act of 2019

The 2019 Dignity in Aging Act covers the five-year reauthorization period beginning in FY 2020. If passed in its current language, the Act will immediately authorize a seven percent increase in funding for all OAA programs in the first year.<sup>16</sup> After FY 2020, the Act will authorize a six percent increase in OAA funding every year for the remaining four years.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the law will extend the authorization of the *RAISE Family Caregivers Act* to develop a national strategy to support family caregivers; incorporate social isolation screening into the health and supportive services seniors receive; establish a new National Research, Demonstration, an Evaluation Center for the Aging Network; strengthen services available to Native Americans and help tribal organizations implement OAA programs; and establish an interagency coordinating committee on age-friendly communities to promote safe and accessible independent living environments.<sup>16</sup> The bill passed the House and is currently awaiting review by the Senate.

#### References

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## Did you know?

Fifteen million older adults volunteer, with nearly half of all seniors 65 and older volunteering in some form.<sup>17</sup>



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#### Questions?

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