



TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO HOUSE MEDICAID COMMITTEE

Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy Officer bergfeld@ohioaging.org
Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
March 11, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeny, and members of the House Finance Committee, I am Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy 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.

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 nursing facility and Assisted Living 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.

Housing: We are also encouraged that the Governor's budget supports investments in housing development in rural and border counties. Improving Ohio's affordable housing network and options for maintaining existing homes can provide more older adults with safe, secure housing and reduce homelessness. In addition to the investments proposed by the governor, we encourage the General Assembly to consider increasing investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) to support affordable housing and home modification and repairs, and provide property tax relief to older adults that targets relief to those most in need and affords financial flexibility for Ohioans to age in their own homes.

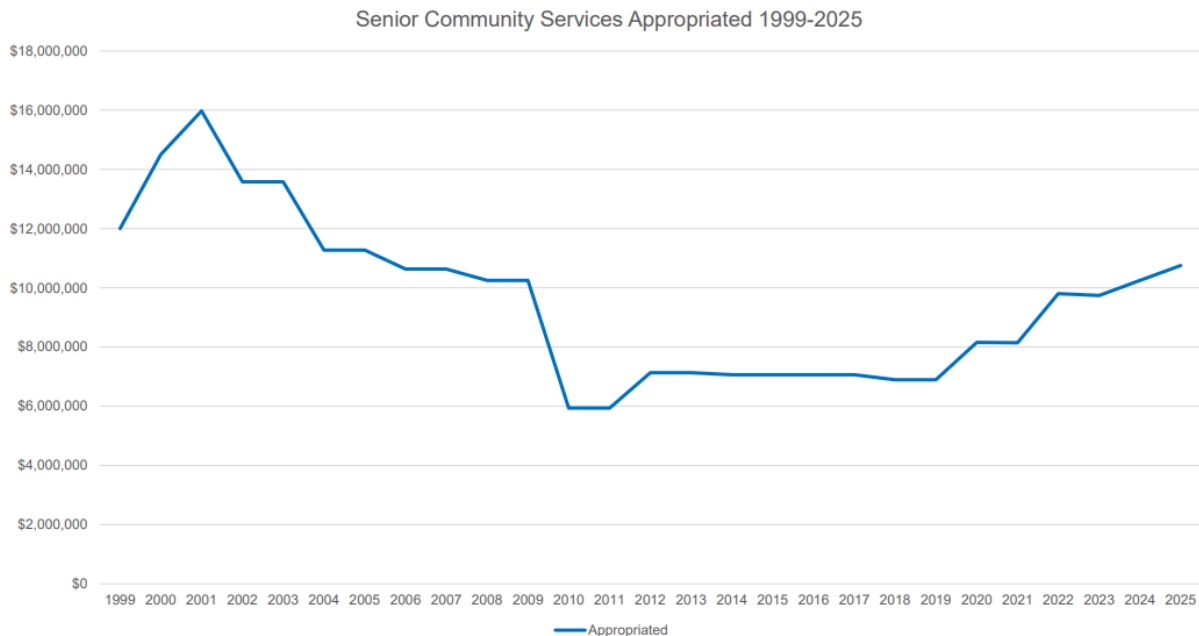
Waiver Programs: PASSPORT and Assisted Living are Medicaid Home and Community – Based (HCBS) waiver programs that have successfully enabled thousands of older

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.

Healthy Aging -> Senior Community Services Program: 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, 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. Unfortunately, funding levels for the OAA and Senior Community Services program have simply not kept up with the need and gaps remain.

During the last budget, the Administration and General Assembly committed \$40 million in one-time state ARPA funding to temporarily fill those gaps through Healthy Aging Grants, which were flexible, community-based grants. We appreciated the significant investment, which had a tremendous impact, but it also demonstrated that there is still a great ongoing need for services that one-time funds cannot meet.



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.

The Senior Community Services Program provides flexible, community-driven funding to Area Agencies on Aging for non-Medicaid services like home modifications and repairs, transportation, meals, housing assistance, personal care, and other types of supports that prevent social isolation. The service priority is determined by an Area Agency on Aging regional needs assessment, with highest priority given to low-income, high need, and cognitively impaired individuals 60 years of age and over.

*With additional funding, **Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2** would eliminate current waiting lists, expand home repair funding and serve three times as many older adults as they did in 2024 (over 200 individuals vs. 60), expand care coordination programming (personal care, home delivered meals, and self-directed services) and serve three times as many older adults as they did in 2024 (over 2000 vs. 612).*

Lower cost and less intensive interventions funded through Senior Community Services:

- Delay and divert from enrollment in Medicaid and in more costly nursing home care,
- Reduce waiting lists for services,
- Enhance health and wellness programming,
- Support family caregivers, and
- Create structures that effectively prevent and address elder abuse and neglect.

*The **Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging** would expand current services, especially meals, to meet demand and rising costs for providers and continue to invest in their housing programs to reduce instances of eviction, foreclosure, and displacement due to unexpected financial hardship.*

Funding services for older adults isn't just an investment in care—it's an economic driver. It supports local organizations and small businesses that employ thousands of workers, from direct care staff to meal providers and transportation services. This funding keeps older adults healthier and independent, reducing costly hospitalizations and nursing home stays. It also strengthens local

*The **Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio** would be able to serve an additional 400 individuals' behavioral health needs, provide an additional 100 individuals and their families with respite care, and serve an additional 250 individuals with home delivered meals and Adult Day services.*

economies by generating jobs, business growth, and tax revenue. Increasing state funding will expand these benefits, ensuring both older adults and our communities thrive.

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.



Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2

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Douglas McGarry, Executive Director

TESTIMONY BEFORE Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

Nicole Khaner, Assistant Director
Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2
March 5, 2025

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, I am Nicole Khaner, Assistant Director of the Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2.

The Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2 serves nine counties in Ohio's west central region, including Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble and Shelby counties. The west central region of Ohio serves both rural and urban communities. The area is home to 295,299 older adults over the age of 60, accounting for 10% of Ohio's total population of older adults in the nine county region. Our Area Agency on Aging serves over 6500 older adults on a daily basis with managing their home and community based services. These home and community based services include providing answers to questions on aging services, community resources, caring for a loved one, to a home delivered meal or personal care assistance.

In the Ohio Department of Aging's FY 2026 and 2027 executive budget request, Director McElroy testified before this committee for supporting healthy aging via Senior

Community Services, supporting home and community based waiver programs and sustaining its workforce, and increasing the personal needs allowance, among others. We support all of these recommendations and we implore the House of Representatives to include them all in House Bill 96.

My focus today is to request the general assembly consider an increase to the Senior Community Services line item by an additional \$10 million dollars per fiscal year. In 2024, we served over 600 older adults in our nine county region with Senior Community Service dollars which provided services such as home repairs, home modifications, transportation, personal care assistance and home delivered meals. These service dollars are just one option to provide resources for those who want to remain in their home but are not eligible for costlier options such as Medicaid or nursing home care. Historically, this funding has been cut or remained stagnant. It has not been until recent years we have seen some restoration in funding. However, lengthy waiting lists for individuals remain.

As you have heard from others in previous testimony, our State received a jolt in investment in the last biennium with the one-time approval of \$40 million in Healthy Aging grants. In our region, these dollars afforded the ability for counties to facilitate transportation pilots, increase congregate meal opportunities and provide home delivered meals, purchase software to link older adults to aides seeking to provide service and provide wellness programs such as how to combat chronic health issues, in addition to many others. The only funding which provides this type of innovative and

flexible programming in the Ohio Department of Aging's current budget is Senior Community Services.

Our region represents about 10% of the State of Ohio's 60 and over population, therefore based on the required funding formula, roughly 9% of the State's Senior Community Services award comes to the region. With the requested funding increase, our funding could increase from \$724,000 to about \$1.5 million dollars. These additional dollars could:

- Eliminate current waiting lists
- Expand home repair and modifications to provide 200 jobs versus the 60 jobs provided in 2024
- Expand home and community based options for those not eligible for Medicaid with services such as personal care and home delivered meals. We could increase those served to almost 2000 in our region versus the 600 we served in 2024.

Flexibility in funding is critical as we continue to see our older population growing and their needs changing. Our Agency receives over 24,000 calls a year from individuals seeking information and resources on long term care services for either themselves or a loved one. At least 60% of those callers surveyed indicate they have never called or contacted our Agency before. Without increases in funding, these new requests and needs will go unmet.

We urge you to consider an additional \$10 million dollars in Senior Community Services in House Bill 96.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



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*Serving Ohio's Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey,
Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas
counties for over 45 years*

Testimony Before Ohio House Children & Human Services Committee

Jud Love, Chief Executive Officer jlove@aaa9.org
Area Agency on Aging Region 9, Inc
05 March 2025

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, I am honored to stand before you today. My name is Jud Love, Chief Executive Officer of the Area Agency on Aging Region 9 (AAA9).

While located in Cambridge, I am proud to represent 9 counties in eastern Ohio comprising of Tuscarawas, Muskingum, Guernsey, Coshocton, Belmont, Jefferson, Carroll, Holmes, and Harrison. AAA9 is but one of the 12 AAAs across the state with extensive experience administering case management for the PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and Ohio Home Care waiver programs. We are also proud to administer Older Americans Act and Senior Community Services programs across our region.

While AAA9 is part of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, we are each unique as our constituencies are as vast and diverse as every member of this committee's. Just like all of you we have been honored and tasked with ensuring we are vocal proponents and supporters of the needs of those in our regions. Our goal is to work collaboratively as a network with the Ohio Department of Aging with whom we are closely aligned in our mission to not only make Ohio the best place to age in the nation, but also partner with people, communities, and organizations to help older adults live independently and enjoy the highest quality of life possible.

Budget Priorities

I echo Beth Kowalczyk, O4A CEO's, prior sentiments in appreciation for the support for the aging network contained in the Governor's proposed budget.

Provider Rates: The increased reimbursement in the last biennial budget allowed providers to increase wages and benefits for the direct care workers they employ. I have seen firsthand the positive impact the increased rates have had on the retention of staff for providers while also ensuring consumers receive the services they need. Between PASSPORT and Assisted Living Waiver AAA9's case managers partner with more than 2,800 consumers who receive over \$60 million in services annually. These funds are paid to providers who in turn pay direct service workers who spend the funds in the communities in which we serve. It is critical these rates are not only sustained but the regular review of these rates in the future will ensure all Ohioans can

continue to choose where they live and how they live as they age. I would encourage the state to pursue methods in which these rates are regularly reviewed with the intent of ensuring access to services for all Ohioans.

Housing: AAA9 was pleased to see the Governor's budget supported investments in housing development in rural counties such as the ones found within the AAA9 region. Ensuring the existing homes of older adults are maintained in a manner that allows them to remain in a safe, secure home provides a quality of life to which all older Ohioans are entitled. I would encourage the General Assembly to please consider increasing investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) to support affordable housing and home modification and repairs. I can personally attest to the fact that this investment is having an impact in my region. AAA9 currently utilizes OHTF funds coupled with Senior Community Services funds to invest over \$300,000 annually in our community for the purpose of ensuring consumers can remain in their homes allowing them to feel valued and respected. At an average cost of \$13,000 per job AAA9 can complete roughly 23 jobs annually in our region. I can also attest to the fact that AAA9 currently has a waitlist for these services.

Healthy Aging-> Senior Community Services Program: The 12 Area Agencies on Aging strategically situated across the state are uniquely connected with the communities they serve. The impact of the Healthy Aging Grants from the last biennium budget cannot be denied. AAA9 was able to partner with and participate in the administration of the Healthy Aging grants in 2 of our 9 counties. Utilizing these funds, we were able to create housing opportunities in 2 of our counties where we could strategically partner Healthy Aging with other housing funds to extend the impact. We were also able to connect older adults with digital literacy opportunities in our rural counties. Unfortunately, we did have 1 county who chose to return the funds rather than seize upon the opportunity. AAA9 would request the state continue to make older adults a priority and invest an additional \$10 million per fiscal year in the state's budget in the Senior Community Services Program. This investment would allow AAAs the flexibility to provide services and programs to persons earlier that would not only meet the needs of home delivered meals and transportation but would also allow us to engage older adults in housing projects allowing them to age in place.

As the newest AAA CEO, I can say I am excited for the opportunity to continue the conversation regarding these priorities while pursuing the goal of making Ohio the best place to age in the nation.