

# OhioAGING

ADVOCACY COALITION



## **SFY 2024-2025 State Budget Blueprint**

### **Home- and Community-Based Services**

As we continue to encounter new opportunities for our communities and our state, older adults want to have the choice to age in their homes and communities. They want to remain engaged and connected. They want to be able to share their experiences and insights with families, neighbors, and the community. Supporting all Ohioans in this way as we age makes our communities, and our state, stronger.

The Ohio Aging Advocacy Coalition (OAAC), a coalition of older adult and caregiver advocacy organizations, is providing key principles and strategies to improve Ohio's overall system of home and community-based services and strengthen the workforce who serves older Ohioans.

### **Current state**

Ohio's 2023-2026 State Plan on Aging identified key themes that emerged from three phases of stakeholder engagement with older adults, caregivers, and other key stakeholders.

They include the following:

- Vast life expectancy disparities exist.
- Housing, transportation, and other community challenges persist.
- While most older Ohioans can cover their basic needs, many are not financially prepared for life after work.
- Caregiver supports and workforce capacity are key issues facing older Ohioans.
- Older Ohioans face mounting challenges related to mental health and addiction.
- Chronic conditions remain a concern.
- Innovation and partnership are key strengths in Ohio's aging network.
- Workforce shortages and social isolation are top challenges exacerbated by COVID-19.

OAAC has identified key principles and solutions that are intended to begin to address the challenges faced by older Ohioans and the systems they rely on to support them as they age.

## **Governor's Budget:**

The Governor's 2024-2025 executive budget proposes increased investments that are vital to supporting older Ohioans in the community.

These include an increase in direct care rates, with the intent to raise the wage to \$16/hour, in the Aging, Medicaid and Developmental Disability waivers; increased rates for the assisted living waiver, adult day services and home-delivered meals; increased funding for PASSPORT Administrative Agencies; increases in funding for the Senior Community Services program; new Healthy Aging grants; an increase to the Alzheimer's and Dementia Respite line item; technology modernization; and an Aging Economy Report.

The Coalition supports all these investments, as well as additional initiatives that are proposed here.

## **Key principles & solutions**

- 1. Provide adequate Medicaid reimbursement.** Ensuring adequate payment for aging services is the best way to improve quality and ensure providers can hire the staff they need to serve Ohio's population of older adults.

*Possible solutions:*

Increase rates for Medicaid home- and community-based care providers and waiver programs to match inflation and provide professional caregivers a livable, family-sustaining wage. This includes PASSPORT, Assisted Living Waiver, Ohio Home Care, State Plan Home Health/Private Duty Nursing, the Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), and the Personal Needs Allowance. While the Governor's budget proposes a rate increase to support an average \$16/hour wage, the Coalition is advocating for a rate increase that supports at least \$20/hour for the direct care workforce, and parity and sustainability in how the rates are set.

Provide a mechanism for regular review of provider payment rates to ensure they do not drop so far from the true cost of care. This could include a rebasing structure similar to what is in place for skilled nursing facilities.

Increase resources for the home and community-based services supporting older adults outside of the Medicaid system through the Senior Community Services program, Healthy Aging Grants, and other initiatives.

- 2. Ensure older adults have choices in their care with proper support for both home and community-based options.** Older Ohioans deserve a system of long-term services and supports that offers different options to match different needs and lifestyle choices.

*Possible solutions:*

Provide work supports that will meet the needs of paid caregivers, including childcare, healthcare, transportation, and other supports, so that more older adults can remain in their homes. The coalition supports the Governor's initiative to create a state affordable housing tax credit to increase access to affordable housing, an increase in subsidized childcare eligibility, and the proposal to provide childcare scholarships for the direct care workforce. Direct care workers supporting older adults and people with disabilities should be eligible for childcare scholarships.

Address the benefit cliff so that individuals can receive pay increases in a way that does not impact their ability to remain employed due to loss of work supports.

Support the continued development of the Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) in Ohio, a proven model that provides needed health care services to nursing home eligible Ohioans who rely on Medicaid and Medicare and wish to remain in their communities. This should include increasing PACE reimbursement and a regular review of PACE payment rates.

Create affordable assisted living opportunities for the Medicaid population so that individuals currently served in assisted living are not forced to move and individuals who do not need the full support of a skilled nursing facility have an affordable option to receive care.

Support the development of new or expanding adult day sites to provide respite to caregivers and offer Ohioans a more affordable home-based care option.

- 3. Support providers in building a workforce that is paid a livable, family-sustaining wage.** Ohio must support efforts to build a stronger direct care workforce to care for its growing population of older adults with care needs.

*Possible solutions:*

Align training and participation requirements across systems to allow mobility between aging, developmental disabilities, and mental health/addiction services.

Support tiered reimbursement or bonuses rewarding advanced training and certification among direct service providers. Provide a single point of entry for caregiving careers modeled on Wisconsin's WisCaregiver Careers program that includes free-of-cost State Tested Nurse Aide (STNA) training, retention bonuses, and dedicated communications support to increase awareness of the program. This can be scaled to provide opportunities for other workers in home- and community-based settings as well (personal care aides, home care aides).

Create and promote career ladders and lattices throughout a variety of roles serving older adults.

- 4. Increase housing security for older adults.** Improving Ohio's affordable housing network and options for maintaining existing homes can provide more older adults with safe, secure housing and reduce homelessness.

*Possible solutions:*

Create a state low-income housing tax credit to incentivize development in the affordable housing sector and provide more older adults with affordable housing. The coalition supports the Governor's proposal to create a state low-income housing tax credit to increase affordable housing access in Ohio.

Increase investment in the Ohio Housing Trust fund to support affordable housing and home modification and repairs.

Provide property tax relief to older adults through expanding the Homestead Exemption, which allows low-income older adults and permanently and totally disabled Ohioans to reduce their property tax bills by shielding some of the market value of their homes from taxation.

- 5. Invest in innovative care models and care coordination.** Investment in innovative care models can help older adults maintain their independence, make more effective use of the workforce, and provide more affordable care options. Improving care coordination for individuals living in the community can prevent the need for costlier institutional care.

*Possible solutions:*

Increase investment in home-based care options such as PACE, affordable assisted living, and adult day services.

Enhance participant-directed services through a streamlined application process, use of provider engagement coaches, competitive wages, and Area Agency on Aging supports.

Explore strategic investments in new technology, such as: artificial intelligence (AI), remote monitoring, technology that simplifies transfers and other physical tasks, and apps that promote mental health and wellness among residents and staff. Develop a provider portal similar to AddnAide (developed by the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio) to facilitate matching of providers to individuals that need services.

Explore streamlining services, such as housekeeping, so that older adults can receive services more quickly.

- 6. Protect older adults from abuse, neglect, and a lack of services, and support greater health outcomes through nutrition.** Ohioans deserve safety, security, and good health as they age in their communities.

*Possible solutions:*

Continue momentum for an Ohio free of older adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation with additional state investment to strengthen Adult Protective Services. The coalition supports the Governor's proposal to increase investment in Adult Protective Services in Ohio with an additional \$4 million per year.

Support an increase to the Alzheimer's Respite Line Item, which has not received an increase for many years despite the number of people being diagnosed with Alzheimer's and other dementia is growing rapidly. The Coalition supports the Governor's proposal to increase the line item with an additional \$2 million per year.

Create a state food assistance supplement for older adults to address increased food insecurity and the loss of SNAP Emergency Allotments for older adults.