

# OhioAGING

## ADVOCACY COALITION

### SFY 2026–2027 STATE BUDGET BLUEPRINT: **Home & Community Based Services**



*The Ohio Aging Advocacy Coalition: Older Ohioans advocating for policies that enrich their lives, empower them, and assure they can age in the place they call home.*

# A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR AGING OHIOANS

As we continue to encounter new opportunities for our communities and our state, we all want to have a choice in how we live as we age. We want to remain engaged and connected. We want to be able to share our experiences and insights with families, neighbors, and the community. Supporting all Ohioans in this way 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.

We thank the DeWine Administration and General Assembly for their historic investments in home and community-based services and the aging network in the SFY2024-2025 State Budget. Great strides were made to improve provider reimbursement rates, increase housing security for low-income older adults, and support the development of home-based care options such as PACE, affordable assisted living and adult day services.

Though important progress was made, older adults and individuals with disabilities continue to face challenges in accessing care, affording and maintaining basic needs like housing and adequate nutrition, and fully participating in their communities.

## CURRENT STATE: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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

# MOVING FORWARD: KEY PRINCIPLES & SOLUTIONS

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. The Coalition supports the initiatives that are proposed here:

## ***Principle: Ensure Sustainability of the HCBS System.***

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. Increased investments in the aging network allocated in the last biennial budget have strengthened the home and community-based services system and the direct care workforce. Increased reimbursement rates for providers have led to increased wages and benefits for direct care workers, better hiring and retention rates, reduced wait lists and more consumers receiving the care they need.

Though these historic rate increases made an impact on the quality and accessibility of the home and community-based services network, it had been over a decade since the last increase. 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.

## ***Possible Solutions:***

- **Provide a mechanism for a regular review of provider payment rates to ensure they reflect the real cost of care.** This includes PASSPORT, Assisted Living Waiver, Ohio Home Care, State Plan Home Health/Private Duty Nursing, adult day services, and the Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE). Requirements for data collection needed to perform a review of provider payment rates should be aligned with state and federal requirements and not be overly burdensome on providers to collect. Data collected should reflect the true cost of providing services.
- **Create equitable rate setting methodologies to ensure parity in direct care worker compensation rates** to ensure access to care across care settings.
- **Increase resources for the home and community-based services supporting older adults outside of the Medicaid system** through the Senior Community Services program, and other initiatives. The coalition supports an additional \$10 million per fiscal year to support the Senior Community Services program.
- **Increase the nursing facility and Assisted Living personal needs allowance (PNA) from \$50 per month to at least \$75 per month.** This increase would help individuals cover personal expenses like toiletries, haircuts, and clothing, reducing financial stress and allowing them to better manage their care needs.

# MOVING FORWARD: KEY PRINCIPLES & SOLUTIONS

***Principle: Ensure older adults have choices in their care with proper support for 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. Systems within long-term services and supports including PASSPORT and MyCare must work efficiently, promote smooth transitions between programs and have sufficient capacity and knowledgeable staff to support consumers' needs.

## ***Possible Solutions:***

- **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.**  
Explore innovative models and increase flexibility in adult day programs.
- **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.
- **Support policies and guidelines within MyCare Ohio that promote quality of care for Ohioans**, protect access to care and support providers.

***Principle: Invest in innovative care models and care coordination.***

Investing 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:***

- **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 older adults and healthcare workers.
- **Consider expanding the provider portal AddnAide** (developed by the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio) to facilitate matching providers to individuals that need services.

# MOVING FORWARD: KEY PRINCIPLES & SOLUTIONS

***Principle: Support providers in building a HCBS 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:***

- **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.
- **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.
- **Align training and participation requirements across systems** to allow mobility between aging, developmental disabilities, and mental health/addiction services.
- **Create and promote career ladders and lattices throughout a variety of roles serving older adults.**

***Principle: 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 an increase of \$10.84 million per fiscal year for statewide screenings, investigations, and protective services.
- **Create a state food assistance supplement for older adults** to address increased food insecurity for older adults. The coalition supports establishing a state supplemental benefit to institute a \$50 per month minimum benefit for SNAP recipients who are age 60 and older.
- **Invest in Pro Seniors' statewide telephone Legal Helpline** to increase capacity and access to civil legal help for older Ohioans, particularly those who are isolated or who have limited incomes. As the older adult population grows, particularly the number of older adults facing income and housing challenges, and legal needs become more acute, the demand for no-cost legal help is outpacing available assistance. An investment will help improve partnerships with Legal Aid and contribute significantly to the well-being of older adults by allowing more older Ohioans to receive the legal help they need to resolve issues that threaten their health, safety and quality of life.

# MOVING FORWARD: KEY PRINCIPLES & SOLUTIONS

## ***Principle: 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:***

- **Increase investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) to support affordable housing and home modification and repairs.** The OHTF typically provides approximately \$50 million each year to support housing activities including: home repair and accessibility modifications for low-income homeowners, rental housing development, homeless shelters and supportive housing operations throughout Ohio's 88 counties.
- **Increase investment in the Resident Services Coordinator Program which offers place-based service coordination in congregate senior housing.** Service coordination promotes cost savings in the system by ensuring high-risk community-residing elders can access basic needs, such as healthy food, social connection, transportation and other community resources, enabling early intervention and forestalling nursing facility care.
- **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,** while balancing tax revenue necessary for essential government services older Ohioans rely on. Options for property tax relief include proposals that expand the homestead exemption, authorize a property tax freeze for certain owner-occupied homes, institute a property tax circuit breaker and cap property tax increases.
- **Review Ohio's Medicaid Estate Recovery Program's impact on housing and access to healthcare for low-income families and those living with disabilities** who rely on Medicaid to pay for long-term care. Consider options within federal requirements that ensure individuals are not dissuaded from using Medicaid when they need it.

The logo for the Ohio AGING ADVOCACY COALITION features the word "Ohio" in a large, dark, sans-serif font, followed by "AGING" in a larger, bold, dark, sans-serif font. Below this, the words "ADVOCACY COALITION" are written in a smaller, dark, sans-serif font. The text is centered and framed by two light teal, curved shapes that sweep upwards from the bottom corners and meet at the top, creating a stylized, wave-like border around the text.

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