



July 2, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of our organizations that collectively represent the state agencies, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), and local senior nutrition providers serving more than 10 million older adults each year through the Older Americans Act (OAA), we thank you for your prior support of emergency funding for OAA programs, including home-delivered meals, in-home services, caregiver assistance, and other community-based supportive services that help older adults remain healthy and independent in their homes and communities. The emergency coronavirus supplemental resources of more than \$1 billion have helped our collective members to address the increasing and unique economic, social and nutritional needs of our nation's most vulnerable older adults.

However, given the uncertain duration and magnitude of this pandemic and the vastly increased caseload of our members as a result, additional funding is necessary and required so that those older adults most at-risk of COVID-19 and in greatest need receive services in their communities as the crisis continues. **We request you provide at least an additional \$1.1 billion in funding for OAA programs in the next coronavirus emergency supplemental funding bill**, which reflects the combined total of OAA funding provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Acts.

In early March, when the pandemic threat became a reality, our members worked together to quickly adapt congregate meal programs to "grab-and-go" distribution centers to prevent hunger, expand the availability of home-delivered meals, stand up telephone reassurance lines to keep seniors less isolated and more connected—and much, much more. At that time, the Aging Network anticipated emergency response actions and services would be needed for a limited period. It is now evident, however, that the need for supplemental support for America's older adults will continue well into the future, as the prolonged spread of COVID-19 means that the older adults we serve need ongoing assistance in securing food, meals, resources and other supportive services to remain living safely and independently in their homes and community.

Virtually all states, AAAs and community-based nutrition providers are serving significantly more people than before the COVID-19 pandemic—and many states and organizations are responding to massive increases in service needs and demands during the pandemic. Not surprisingly, the most in-demand service remains nutrition support—primarily home-delivered meals—but also other forms of relief such as the delivery of groceries to the home (OAA Title III C). For example, meal providers have reported a doubling, or even tripling, of the number of weekly meals served, and their waiting lists, which existed before the current public health crisis, have grown by 26 percent.¹ States and AAAs have also reported increased need for in-home services and demand for telephone reassurance and wellness-check calls and information and referral/assistance services, to help people get connected to services and supports (OAA Title III B). A recent survey of AAAs indicated that 93 percent were serving more clients, and nearly 70 percent reported existing clients’ needs had also grown.²

Additionally, money is needed for technological solutions to address the very real threat of social isolation and loneliness. The physical impact of loneliness on older adults is staggering. One study found a prolonged lack of social connection for seniors was equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.³ Loneliness and social isolation also heavily cost our health care system, with one study estimating an additional \$6.7 billion in Medicare funds spent because of loneliness annually.⁴ In short, a cliff in federal fiscal relief would be particularly harmful to the older adults we serve, leaving them less safe, nourished and socially connected.

While all OAA programs and services work to mitigate social isolation to varying degrees, the pandemic has exacerbated this challenge as the traditional solutions (e.g., congregate dining, adult day, in-person health and wellness classes), are no longer current options. The Aging Network has done a tremendous job pivoting their programs and services to meet clients’ needs in the safest ways possible, but more must be done to expand the most effective service delivery methods in a newly virtual world that blends the Aging Network’s person-centered approach to reach those most in need.

We also support additional relief to state and local governments, which have been tested by unprecedented need as revenues plummet. Absent significant relief from Congress, states and localities will be forced to make cuts to these same OAA programs, as well as other state-funded efforts to support older adults. Some states have already proposed deep funding cuts to senior services. To mitigate these harms, Congress should ensure that:

- emergency OAA federal funding includes a waiver of all state and local match requirements;
- states are urged to preserve and not reduce their investment in these critical programs; and
- so that such state and local cuts can be prevented, significant state and local aid is included in a COVID-19 relief package.

¹ Meals on Wheels America (research conducted by Trailblazer Research), 2020, *New Survey Data: Demand on Meals on Wheels Network Swells and Wait Lists Grow due to COVID Pandemic*. Available at: <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/national/press-room/news/2020/05/07/new-survey-data-demand-on-meals-on-wheels-national-network-swells-and-wait-lists-grow-due-to-covid-19-pandemic>

² National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), #AAAsAtWork for Older Adults, pending publication by July 9, 2020, www.n4a.org.

³ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., & Layton, J.B . 2010, *Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review*. Available at: doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

⁴ AARP, 2017, *Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults*. Available at: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2017/10/medicare-spends-more-on-socially-isolated-older-adults.pdf>

The cost of inaction will be far greater than the upfront investment. The impact of hunger, malnourishment and loneliness on older adults will cause otherwise avoidable health care costs and unnecessary suffering.

We are extremely grateful for the bipartisan support you have already offered for the programs and services of the OAA, both in emergency supplemental funding and in the regular appropriations process. **As you prepare the next emergency package, please consider our recommendation for continued and significant funding increases for these vital community aging services and supports and the millions of older adults in need.** As always, we and our members stand ready to assist you however we can, so please reach out if we can provide additional information or resources.

Sincerely,



Martha Roherty
Executive Director
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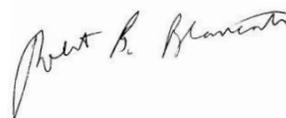
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House Committee on Education and Labor
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