



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 1200 / Washington, DC 20036 / Tel: 202-872-0888 / Fax: 202-872-0057 / www.n4a.org

Date: January 7, 2009
From: National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
To: Obama Presidential Transition Team
Re: Aging Priorities for the 2009 Stimulus Package

As you consider an economic recovery package, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) urges you to take the following important steps to help stimulate the economy and protect the nation's most vulnerable older adults who are at risk of losing the critical health care and supportive services they depend upon.

Emergency funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and services vital to vulnerable elders. We were very pleased to see \$60 million for OAA Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals Programs (\$40.75 million and \$19.25 million, respectively) in the Senate's proposed economic stimulus measure (S. 3604), and encourage you to include this proposed funding and additional funding for OAA Supportive Services in any agreement that is reached on the economic recovery package.

Recent price increases for food and fuel have further compounded the problem of years of funding which has not kept pace with inflation or the growing aging population, leaving many aging programs struggling to meet the needs of current elders, even as new clients seek assistance in ever-greater numbers. Reports from around the country make it clear that older adults are cutting back on their food, medications, and other necessities because of the effects of the economic recession. Many aging programs believe that this situation will significantly worsen this winter as home heating bills force older adults to absorb these additional expenses by depriving themselves of other basic essentials such as food and medications.

Aid to states through a temporary increase in federal funding for Medicaid. Many states in fiscal crisis are now considering drastic cuts to Medicaid due to budget shortfalls, which would further aggravate the economic situation. We believe an increase in the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) would be one of the most effective ways to stimulate the economy and avoid Medicaid cuts that would jeopardize the health care and services for millions of older adults and persons with disabilities. There is also a clear and proven precedent for an increase in the FMAP during tough economic times. In 2003, Congress provided states with temporary fiscal relief, which had a significant positive effect on states' business activity and wages, enabling them to stave off drastic cuts in this critical program.

An additional investment in the Senior Community Service Employment Program to train and place 30,000 more older workers in community service jobs during the economic recession. The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Administration, provides a network of respected state and local job training and community service programs that is well positioned to assist local communities in promoting job creation and public service. By providing the SCSEP with a temporary infusion of \$187.6 million in additional resources under the economic stimulus plan state and national grantees could undertake an expanded role in promoting economic recovery by assisting an additional 30,000 older adults seeking employment during these tough economic times.

Low-income older workers eligible for the SCSEP were already vulnerable before the downturn due to numerous barriers to employment and the recession has only made it more difficult for them. Community service placements will put low-income older workers on a path to self-sufficiency and reduce the



likelihood that they will have to depend on other state and federal assistance programs such as unemployment benefits.

Greater resources to support community-level outreach and one-on-one assistance to older adults to help them make the conversion to digital television. Additional resources of at least \$10 million are needed to ensure that older adults continue to have over-the-air television access after February 17, 2009. This funding would take efforts currently being undertaken by n4a and the Keeping Seniors Connected Coalition to national scale through a targeted campaign that would effectively build on the ongoing education efforts by government and private industry to the general public, but would specifically offer what those do not: direct, one-on-one assistance to older adults at risk of not making the DTV transition successfully on their own. Community-based projects are working feverishly to assist as many seniors as possible before the conversion date, but a significant infusion of new federal resources is needed in order to ramp up efforts nationwide and ensure that large numbers of older adults are not cut off from emergency information and other television programming.

Direct a portion of infrastructure spending to community agencies and nonprofit organizations by encouraging states and local governments to invest projects that are environmentally sustainable and promote livable communities for all ages, such as community centers that serve people of all ages (i.e., infrastructure improvements that meet the needs of people across their lifespan), affordable low-income housing, and transportation projects that take into account the needs of all users and enhance the accessibility and availability of mobility services.

We also would like to express our support for other critical steps you can take to help spur the economy, such as an increase in the Social Services Block Grant program and additional energy assistance under Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for older adults in crisis.

In these difficult economic times, it is now more important than ever for the Administration and Congress to provide emergency spending for these important community programs to help stem the tide of service reductions taking place. Without this support, more seniors will face the risk of going hungry, becoming isolated, suffering deteriorating health, and potentially losing their independence and facing unnecessary and more costly institutionalization.

Thank you for considering n4a's request to protect the millions of older Americans and persons with disabilities who rely on these safety net supports as your incoming Administration and Congress move forward with its plans to address an economic recovery package.

Sincerely,

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)