



# AZ Aging

## **AZAging's Report of Activities of Area Agencies on Aging**

### **Looming Federal Funding Cuts and ACL Restructuring Effects**

The Area Agencies on Aging run under the authority of the Older Americans Act of 1965, which turns 60 this month and has provided a bedrock of support for social services for older adults across Arizona. Since January, Area Agencies on Aging have seen continued threats to funding and structure - both in the Administration for Community Living, and throughout the federal government.

In January 2025, Secretary Kennedy of the Department of Health and Human Services announced a restructuring of the Department of Health and Human Services which would eliminate the Administration for Community Living. The operations of the Administration for Community Living was to be split between the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Though no formal proposal has been made and no permanent organization chart has been created, a leaked HHS document from mid-April shows that most Older Americans Act programs will fall under CMS, while nutrition services will fall under ACF. We respect the President's authority to reorganize executive departments within the federal government, but continue to be concerned about splitting Older Americans Act programs between ACF and CMS when the Act calls for unity of programming under the Administration on Aging.

Furthermore, this leaked budget from HHS showed potential eliminations of the following programs:

- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman
- Lifespan Respite Care
- Evidence-Based Healthy Living Programs
- The State Health Insurance Assistance Program
- State funding for Aging and Disability Resource Centers
- Funding for Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services

AZAging continues to be concerned about the likelihood of potential cuts and elimination to key services for older adults provided by Area Agencies on Aging statewide. In addition to these cuts directly to Area Agencies on Aging, we continue to be concerned about the potential cuts to community action agencies, headstart



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programs, and LIHEAP, which help fund administrative structures at some of our Area Agencies on Aging.

Potential federal funding cuts have created a state of uncertainty within the Area Agencies on Aging - prompting staff to become nervous about job security, creating layoffs in organizations, and resulting in a reduction of services to the community. Statewide, over 20 full time employee positions with Area Agencies on Aging will be eliminated in preparation for budget cuts.

## **Social Security**

At the federal level, the Trump Administration has also consolidated the number of Social Security offices available to older adults. This restructure has resulted in longer wait times for older adults receiving help from a Social Security office. Area Agencies on Aging are also concerned about a change in federal administrative policy that requires older adults to go to a Social Security office in person to verify their identity. Though we understand the need for identity verification, accessing Social Security offices can be challenging, especially in rural and tribal communities. Simultaneously these communities also suffer from low access to broadband internet, which makes virtual verification of identity difficult. Area Agencies on Aging have continued to hear increasing concern from older Arizonans regarding long wait times and uncertainty around receiving a Social Security check.

## **Medicaid**

AZAging continues to monitor the proposed cuts to the Medicaid program with trepidation. Over 60% of older Arizonans rely on Medicaid to pay for long-term care and supportive services that allow them to remain in their homes and community with dignity and respect through the Arizona Long-Term Care System (ALTCS). We strongly oppose changes to Medicaid's FMAP ratio - which would put these services at risk throughout Arizona.

## **Arizona State Legislature**

The Arizona Legislature continues its session as we look towards summer months on approval of a State Budget. This year, AZAging requests a continuation of previously appropriated one-time funding from the State Legislature for both home and community-based services and housing assistance.



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For home and community-based services, we request \$5 million to continue one-time funding that was appropriated two years ago by the legislature to support older adults in living independently in their own homes and communities. Last year, the state legislature approved a \$2 million appropriation in this area - which was an effective funding cut of \$3 million statewide. Though Area Agencies on Aging were largely able to backfill this funding cut last year, we know that funding continues to be of deep concern. Without a continuation of the \$5 million appropriation from two years ago - Area Agencies on Aging from across the State of Arizona will be forced to make unprecedented service reductions.

In addition to home and community-based services, we also request \$5 million from the Arizona State Legislature to continue a pilot housing assistance program through the Area Agencies on Aging. Area Agencies on Aging have served over 1,500 older adults throughout Arizona, assisting them with one-time moving expenses, utility bills, and property taxes to ensure that they remain sustainably housed. The fastest growing proportion of the homeless population are older adults, and this program actively works to reduce the likelihood of an older adult becoming unhoused.

## **Welcoming a New Area Agency on Aging Director**

AZAging welcomes a new Area Agency on Aging director to Pima Council on Aging, Robert Ojeda. Originally from Peru, Robert immigrated to the United States to pursue his higher education - earning a PhD in Adult & Extension Education from Cornell University. For most of his professional life, Robert has spent time in Tucson, working as the Chief Program Officer at the Community Food Bank for Southern Arizona. Robert has also worked with Feeding America and led a food bank in Seattle, Washington. Robert shares a personal passion in PCOA's mission. During his time at the Community Food Bank, Robert saw PCOA's mission in action and was greatly inspired. We are excited to welcome Robert to the AZAging team!



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## Regional Updates

### **Region One Area Agency on Aging**

In April, Mary Lynn Kasunic, President & CEO of Region One Area Agency on Aging, was invited to present to several legislators by Representative Sarah Ligouri. The presentation was a part of a Housing and Homelessness Summit. Habitat for Humanity also presented. Mary Lynn shared information about the Justa Senior Center and the Agency's work to build a new Justa Senior Center in the vacant land next to the current center.

On May 1, Area Agency on Aging staff also attended the Mercy Housing, Power of Home awards banquet. Region One received the Resident Services Partner Award for the programming it provides in Mercy Housing's senior complexes throughout Maricopa County. The Agency programs offered include health promotion classes such as A Matter of Balance and Walk with Ease; Rx Matters (medication misuse) EMPOWER (to build older adults resilience and protective factors to prevent abuse).

### **Pima Council on Aging**

PCOA welcomes its new President & CEO, Robert Ojeda, PhD to the organization. Robert brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in social services and throughout the southern Arizona community. During this transition, Robert and the PCOA are focused on continuity of service and strategically moving the organization forward.

This quarter PCOA also received a \$2 million grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This grant will help to bolster the program at PCOA for older adult home modifications and repairs.

### **NACOG Aging**

NACOG Aging is excited to restore attendant care services enrollments to 12 units per month. Attendant care at NACOG Aging had previously been capped at 8 units per month since November 2023. This increase helps to realize the value of these services to the older adults that they serve.

### **WACOG Area Agency on Aging**

WACOG Area Agency on Aging is currently focused on strategic planning for FY 2026 and beyond. With looming budget cuts from the federal government, WACOG Area



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Agency on Aging continues to determine scenario planning with an emphasis on community service, program continuity, flexibility, and innovation.

## **Central Arizona Aging**

Central Arizona Aging has expanded services from one Memory Cafe offered in the region once per month to three Memory Cafes in the region offered once per month. Memory Cafes are a program that helps people with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias and their caregivers find community and stimulate memory and activity.

Arizona Complete Health recently awarded Central Arizona Aging \$100,000 to purchase a transportation van to assist people in getting to and from the senior center in Globe, Arizona. Transportation in rural communities is a significant barrier to socialization and proper nutrition assistance programming.

## **SEAGO Area Agency on Aging**

SEAGO Area Agency on Aging has been working to spread the word about the impacts on federal funding cuts to Area Agencies on Aging. Recently, SEAGO was featured on KGUN9 news in the Tucson media market discussing the federal funding cuts and impacts they would have on older adults.