

Talking Points for Administration on Aging Sponsored Listening Sessions Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization

February 18, 2010

The Alzheimer's Association strongly supports the programs established by the Older Americans Act (OAA), including important programs for individuals living with Alzheimer's and their caregivers, such as caregiver support programs, long term care programs, Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), and other resources.

Since 1965, the Older Americans Act has provided critical community social services for older persons – helping seniors live active and independent lives for as long as possible.

Many OAA programs benefit the 5.3 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, including 200,000 individuals living with younger-onset Alzheimer's in the U.S.

Benefits for People with Younger-Onset Alzheimer's Disease

The Older Americans Act (OAA) also provides critical help for families who are taking care of younger persons with Alzheimer's disease (those under age 65).

In 2006, the Older Americans Act included one of the first public policy provisions to benefit individuals living with early onset Alzheimer's disease. The OAA permitted the National Family Caregiver Support Program to provide supportive services, including caregiving training, respite care and counseling, to individuals caring for persons with early onset Alzheimer's disease.

Help for Caregivers

The National Family Caregiver Support Program provides federal dollars to all 50 states to expand and enhance existing caregiver support services for family caregivers of people aged 60 and older.

Nearly 10 million people care for individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementia and provide 8.5 billion hours of unpaid care per year -- valued at \$94 billion a year.

As Alzheimer's and other dementias usually progress slowly, most caregivers spend many years in the caregiving role – in fact at any one time, 32 percent of family and other unpaid caregivers of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias have been providing help for five years or longer and 39 percent have been providing it for one to four years.

Alzheimer caregivers experience high levels of stress and depression as well as other negative effects on their health, employment, income and financial security.

In a recent study, 24 percent of spouse-caregivers reported an ER visit or hospitalization in the previous six months. Caregivers who were taking care of individuals who needed more help with daily activities and had more behavioral symptoms were more likely to have an ER or hospital visit.

Many Older Americans Act programs help family caregivers, and we know the need for education, information, guidance and support for caregivers is paramount. OAA programs help provide many caregivers assistance as they manage health and long term care issues, navigate daily activities such as bathing and dressing, and deal with symptoms of dementia such as memory loss, inability to communicate, and agitation. Family caregivers take on all this responsibility while managing their own homes and families, and frequently, while being employed outside the home.

Here in Northern California and Northern Nevada Older Americans Act money paid for information & referrals, home visits and training and support to thousands of caregivers dealing with dementia. This funding locally allowed the Alzheimer's Association and its community partners to do outreach and provide culturally relevant dementia services to Vietnamese, Chinese, Latino and Native American families. Before these programs began there was a gap in services for diverse families. With OAA funding we can now actively promote awareness, diagnosis and early intervention in these under served communities.

Conclusion

It is imperative that the Older Americans Act continue to support the unique caregiving challenges of those with Alzheimer's or other dementia – particularly as this population is likely poised to grow significantly over the coming years with an aging baby boomer generation.

During the next reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, the Alzheimer's Association looks forward to bolstering dementia training for professionals, evidence-based training for caregivers, and programs and services for younger-onset individuals and their families.