

Five Ways Congress Can Strengthen the Older Americans Act, and What Philanthropy Can Do

First signed into law in 1965, the [Older Americans Act \(OAA\)](#) provides critical services that address the social drivers of health for older adults such as nutrition, transportation, senior centers, elder rights protections, caregiver support, and health promotion. A popular, bipartisan, and effective law, the OAA is set to expire on September 30, 2024, if it is not reauthorized.

The [2024 reauthorization of the OAA](#) will be the first since the COVID-19 pandemic. This presents a historic opportunity to meet the social needs that COVID-19 revealed and magnified and to match funding levels to the growth of the older population and the true cost of aging in America

Why is the reauthorization of the OAA important for philanthropy?

Through the Aging Services Network created by the OAA, private philanthropy has long partnered with the government to help older Americans enjoy greater health, well-being, and social connection. This public-private partnership has dramatically increased funding for OAA programs, fostered innovation, and helped provide flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these successes, the reality is that 12 million older Americans worry about having enough food to eat, nearly a quarter are considered to be social isolated, and nearly 95 percent live with a chronic health condition. These hardships are more likely to fall on women and people of color, with more than two-thirds of single Black women and more than three-quarters of single Latina women facing disability and financial insecurity in later life, according to the [Elder Index](#). These inequities place increasing pressure on private philanthropy to help fill the gap.

How can my foundation contribute to a strong OAA?

Foundations play a critical role at every stage of the OAA, from the time Congress begins reauthorizing the law, to the appropriation of funding, to the implementation of OAA programs. Now is the time to act. Some actions your foundation can take include:

- Determine how much of your funding directly supports OAA grantees, or indirectly strengthens the OAA by supporting complementary services meeting the social needs of older Americans.
- If you are funding OAA or related programs, bring additional funders on board by helping connect their goals to the diverse social needs of an aging America.
- Share your experiences funding social programs for older adults with members of Congress, especially during the authorization and appropriations process.
- Engage with your grantee partners and community stakeholders to analyze gaps in access to social services for older adults—particularly for historically disadvantaged groups and those with less access to savings and home equity—and develop recommendations to fill these gaps.
- Support your grantee partners to educate Congress about the positive impact of OAA programs and the need to increase funding and strengthen the law.
- Speak publicly about the need to reauthorize and increase funding for the OAA.

If you have questions about what your 501c3 foundation can do under IRS lobbying rules, you can visit the Alliance for Justice's [Bolder Advocacy](#) program.



What are some ways Congress can strengthen the OAA?

In March 2024, GIH and GIA made the following recommendations to Congress in [response to a request for feedback](#) issued by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

- 1. Increase and optimize funding for OAA programs.** Congress should heed the call to double OAA authorization levels, saving money on more costly medical needs that OAA programs help to prevent. Congress should establish a simple oversight process for OAA activities, and use research, demonstration, and evaluation funds to identify “best bets” across OAA programs.
- 2. Better ensure that OAA programs reach those most in need.** Congress should better identify who is in greatest need of OAA programs by using proven tools such as the [Elder Index](#) and targeting historically disadvantaged groups with fewer savings. Congress should standardize and increase data collection on population subgroups, while protecting against discrimination.
- 3. Strengthen programs for rural populations and address social isolation.** To better support rural areas—which are aging faster than cities and are also home to most OAA programs benefiting Native Americans—Congress should clearly define “rurality” in the OAA. Congress should also enact legislation to better address social isolation in rural areas and everywhere.
- 4. Strengthen support for paid and unpaid caregivers.** Congress should support our nation’s caregivers by reauthorizing and funding the [RAISE Family Caregivers Act](#) that calls for a National Family Caregiver Strategy. Congress should also enact the new [Supporting Our Direct Care Workforce and Family Caregivers Act](#), to support the direct care workforce and family caregivers with special attention to historically disadvantaged groups who are most in need of long-term services and support but least able to afford them.
- 5. Bolster interagency and cross-sectoral action on aging.** Congress should [ask](#) the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging to award grants to states to create or implement Multisector Plans for Aging. Congress should use the OAA to authorize the next White House Conference on Aging, including time frame, funding, goals, and reporting requirements.

How can I learn more?

Grantmakers In Health (GIH) and Grantmakers In Aging (GIA) [announced a partnership](#) in October 2023 to engage private funders in advancing the reauthorization of the OAA. For more information, and to get involved, please visit the websites of [GIH](#) and [GIA](#).