



The Older Americans Act and Diverse Elders: New Solutions for Critical Constituencies

updated March 2019

The Diverse Elders Coalition, a national policy advocacy coalition working on behalf of communities of color; American Indian and Alaska Native Communities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities, is thrilled to highlight our coalition's priorities for the 2019 reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. This "crown jewel" of aging policy has enormous implications in the ability of our community members to age in good health and with dignity.

The Diverse Elders Coalition (DEC) recognizes the vital role that the OAA plays in the delivery of services to all elders. We also know that the constituencies that are the most marginalized require services that meet our communities' needs in specific ways. **One-size-fits all legislation does not work.** The DEC has worked in solidarity with other aging advocacy organizations as well as other allies to support approaches that address the unique needs of diverse elders.

The DEC asks Congress to increase the authorized funding for all titles of the OAA, and we have identified specific priorities for Congress to consider as it works to meet the needs of older Americans:

Data Collection and Research: Naming the Issues and Naming the Solutions

- Legislation should specifically identify constituencies that are particularly vulnerable, including communities of color, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and LGBT communities, especially in provisions that refer to communities with "minority status" and with "greatest social need."
- Data collection, project assessments, and reporting requirements in legislation should be amended to ensure that all racial and ethnic groups, American Indians/Alaska Natives, as well as LGBT older adults, are provided the opportunity to participate in research that provides greatest benefit to the community. This includes employing techniques, utilizing resources, and creating partnerships with organizations that have demonstrated expertise in working with diverse communities.
- Legislation should identify additional mechanisms to more specifically address the needs of diverse elders and explore new ways to provide services to them.
- American Indian and Alaska Native tribes are sovereign nations and must be recognized as such. Programming, research, and policy that impact Indian Country must be developed in collaboration with tribes and tribal communities, including their internal review boards and tribal governments, and data sovereignty must be honored.

Cultural and Linguistic Competence: Specific Solutions for Specific Constituencies

- Legislation should include provisions that promote cultural and linguistic competence for all racial and ethnic groups, American Indian/Alaska Native, as well as for LGBT older adults, across physical and mental health, and wellbeing.
- Cultural competency in family structures is an important determinant of program eligibility-defining who is legally connected to whom for purposes of receiving services. Provisions should acknowledge the various family structures that are present in diverse communities, and

explicitly reference a broader range of family relationships, especially in ways that better serve the most vulnerable constituencies.

- Provisions should address specific disparities that exist for different communities in terms of social determinants of health and other outcomes. Identifying these disparities and solutions to address them should be a priority.
- Reauthorization should support and expand the scope of Title V: SCSEP to provide a broad range of direct and referred services for seniors who need job training and placement services and income supports by adopting a person-centered approach that includes assessment of need, economic casework, coordination of benefits, and engagement of diverse service providers.
- Reauthorization should support and expand the scope of Title VI: Grants for Services for Native Americans, in acknowledgment of the treaties signed with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and the U.S. government's pledge to provide for those communities. The programs provided by this title are essential to the wellbeing of tribal Elders.

Non-Discrimination and Equal Treatment under Law: Solutions for Protecting the Most Vulnerable

- Elder justice is an important aspect of the Older Americans Act and protecting older adults that experience multiple forms of discrimination and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and national origin, needs to be a priority.
- Provisions that specifically ensure compliance with current federal law requiring access to services for elders with limited English proficiency should be prioritized.
- Many elders have different citizenship statuses and/or live in families with mixed status. Provisions that support these elders and their caregivers should not be denied because of citizenship status.
- Federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.
- Other areas that have a federal relationship with the U.S. government, including Puerto Rico, Native Hawaiian homestead land, and/or other territories, commonwealths, or jurisdictions with other political status deserve consideration and their residents should be included as well.

We support the Older Americans Act as a key piece of civil rights legislation. The communities we serve have been part of other civil rights and social justice struggles and know what it means to face discrimination. Their knowledge informs our advocacy and support for legislation that more fully recognizes the impact of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia on diverse elders.

We ask for equity in service delivery because aging policies affect all American communities including a growing base of people of color, American Indian/Alaska Native, and LGBT Elders.

In order to fully realize the intent of the Older Americans Act, we must ensure that all elders receive services regardless of any social, cultural or geographic, barriers they may face.