



Council on Aging
of Southwestern Ohio

Answers on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging

*A Link to Services for
Older Adults and their Caregivers*

Whether you are an older adult yourself, or a caregiver concerned about the well-being and independence of an older adult, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are ready to help. AAAs in communities across the country plan, coordinate and offer services that help older adults remain in their home - if that is their preference - aided by services such as Meals-on-Wheels, homemaker assistance and whatever else it may take to make independent living a viable option. By making a range of options available, AAAs make it possible for older individuals to choose the services and living arrangement that suit them best.

These agencies offer programs that make a difference in the lives of all older adults ... from the frail older person who can remain at home if they receive the right services to those who are healthy and can benefit from the activities and socialization provided by community-based programs such as senior centers.

AAAs were established under the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 1973 to respond to the needs of Americans aged 60 and over in every local community. The OAA also helps fund Native American aging programs, known as "Title VI," to meet the unique needs of older American Indians, Aleuts, Eskimos and Hawaiians.

The services available through AAA and Title VI agencies fall into five broad categories: information and access services, community-based services, in-home services, housing and elder rights. Within each category a range of programs is available.

Information and Access services:

- Information and Referral/Assistance - a source for locating services available from a AAA or Title VI agency or from another service agency in the community.
- Health Insurance Counseling - helps beneficiaries understand their options and rights under Medicare, Medicare+Choice and Medicaid and obtain information on Medigap and other insurance alternatives.
- Client Assessment - a determination of the client's needs and eligibility for services.
- Care Management - a review of an individual's social, psychological and physical health challenges, resulting in a "plan of care" for services or treatment, if appropriate.
- Transportation - rides to critical destinations such as a doctor's office or the grocery store.
- Caregiver Support - education and resources that enable caregivers to provide care for an older family member while maintaining their own quality of life.
- Retirement Planning and Education - help for older adults as they prepare for their retirement, with a focus on issues such as pensions, health concerns, legal issues, and work and leisure options.

Community-based services:

- Employment Services - a way to help the individual find meaningful work, including assessment, testing, job counseling, education and placement.
- Senior Centers - a gathering place where older adults can enjoy social, physical and recreational activities. Senior Centers may serve as congregate meal sites.
- Congregate Meals - group meals served at senior centers, schools and other sites for the purpose of providing a nutritious meal in a social environment.

- Adult Day Care Services - a community-based group program designed to meet the needs of functionally impaired adults and provide respite for their caregivers.
- Volunteer Opportunities - a way for healthy older adults to continue to contribute to their community.

In-home services:

- Meals-on-Wheels - mid-day and evening meals delivered to individuals who cannot shop or prepare their own meals, often by a volunteer who also provides a sense of security and social contact to a homebound individual.
- Homemakers - assistance with tasks essential to maintaining a household, such as food shopping and housekeeping.
- Chore Services - a step beyond homemaking - includes minor home repairs, yard work and general home maintenance.
- Telephone Reassurance - regular, pre-scheduled calls to homebound older adults to reduce isolation and provide a routine safety check.
- Friendly Visiting - periodic neighborly visits to homebound older adults to provide social contact and reassurance.
- Energy Assistance and Weatherization - payment of fuel bills and home weatherization for low income people.
- Emergency Response Systems - electronic devices which allow individuals to contact a response center in the case of an emergency, such as a fall.
- Home Health Services - a variety of services including skilled nursing care, health monitoring, dispensing of medication, physical and other forms of therapy, and instructing individuals and family members about homecare.
- Personal Care Services - assistance with bathing, feeding, walking and other daily activities.
- Respite Care - a break for family members from caregiving responsibilities for a short period of time.

Housing:

- Senior Housing - housing designed to accommodate the needs and preferences of independent older adults.
- Alternative Community-Based Living Facilities - a range of housing facilities that bridge the gap between independent living and nursing homes, such as assisted living and adult foster care.

Elder Rights:

- Legal Assistance - advice and counsel for older persons and their families faced with financial and legal concerns.
- Elder Abuse Prevention Programs - designed to alleviate situations of abuse, neglect or self-neglect; includes programs such as adult protection and guardianship/conservatorship.
- Ombudsmen Services for Complaint Resolution - ombudsmen investigate and, when possible, resolve complaints made by or on behalf of older adults who are residents of long-term care facilities.

The wide range of services and funding sources managed by AAAs and Title VI agencies enable them to direct consumers to service choices that meet an individual's needs. AAAs play a pivotal role in assessing community needs and developing programs that respond to those needs. These agencies also act as advocates for improved services for older persons and their families.

AAAs often serve as portals to care, assessing multiple service needs, determining eligibility, authorizing or purchasing services and monitoring the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of services. AAAs provide direct services and contract with local providers to furnish other services in the community.

All AAAs and Title VI agencies support a range of home and community based services, but these services vary across communities. While there is much consistency in the types of essential home and community-based services available across the country, these services are customized to reflect varying local needs and resources.

The experience and knowledge to make the right link

AAAs have more than 25 years experience administering and coordinating services for older adults. And, as the population has changed over time - with people living longer but facing chronic illness and frailty - AAA services have evolved to meet these new and more challenging needs. AAAs coordinate the provision of low-cost, comprehensive, quality care to millions of older persons nationwide by helping them and their families navigate a complex system of services. In their local communities, these agencies strive to maximize service potential and avoid duplication of effort. They also collaborate with other groups to sponsor events of interest to older adults and their caregivers.

For years, AAAs and Title VI agencies have skillfully managed care for vulnerable populations by maximizing private and public resources to ensure that essential services are available to millions of minority, frail and low-income older persons in need of comprehensive long term care. These agencies provide security to family members of all ages who know that their loved one's choices and preferences will be given the highest priority.

The mission of AAAs and Title VIs - to make it easier for older persons to live independently in the comfort of their own surroundings - is not only cost effective, it is the preferred choice for millions of older adults nationwide.

(Source: National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, <http://www.n4a.org/aboutaaas.cfm>)