



Leadership Council
of Aging Organizations

Debra Whitman, Chair

January 22, 2025

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 68 national nonprofit organizations promoting the interests and well-being of older adults. Since 1980, LCAO has provided leadership and vision to help the United States meet the opportunities and challenges an increasing population of older people has provided this country.

Older adults aged 50-plus make enormous contributions to our economy. For example, in 2018, 56 cents out of every dollar spent in the U.S. was attributable to the 50-plus age group and as Americans live longer, we expect that to increase to 61 cents by 2050.¹ In 2030, as the first of the millennials begin to turn 50, this age group will contribute \$12.6 trillion to the U.S. economy.² This spending supports businesses and creates jobs, and results in major tax revenues at the state and federal levels.

Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the workforce and our communities. Many older Americans are choosing to work longer than typical retirement age and continue to contribute their skills and expertise to various industries and the government. Many start businesses or engage in part-time work. Retired individuals are often gainfully engaged in entrepreneurship, mentorship and volunteer activities, providing valuable intergenerational learning, and making significant cultural, social and economic contributions.

The 2020 Census demonstrated that the fastest growing demographic is older Americans. We know that people over the age of 65 make up almost 17% of the population or about 1 in 6 people in the United States, which is a 38.6% increase from the previous decade.³ Yet, despite this increase, federal funding to administer the Social Security Act or the programs within the Older Americans Act have not kept pace with the demand. And other vital programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, which were designed to keep pace with older people's health and economic security needs, are now under threat because of that growth in the number of our fellow citizens.

We look forward to working with you and your Administration in your new term to fulfill your campaign promises to America's older people to protect Medicare and Social Security, and to provide access to affordable health care, housing and long-term services and supports. In this letter, LCAO provides eight key priorities in these areas that we urge you to keep in mind as you set your agenda for domestic policies over the next four years. Older Americans are looking to you to protect them from efforts to increase their costs, cut their benefits or harm critical programs on which they rely.

EIGHT KEY PRIORITIES FOR OLDER AMERICANS

Strengthen Medicaid

We urge the Administration to protect and strengthen Medicaid. We would like to work with you and Congress to preserve and strengthen access to health care for older adults through Medicaid. Medicaid covers life-saving care for over 8 million Americans age 65 and older. Large majorities of Americans support this key program. Importantly, Medicaid is the primary payer for both institutional and non-institutional long-term care in the United States. Medicaid is the primary payer for more than 60% of nursing home residents and Medicaid enables older people to live independently in the community with home and community-based services. Medicaid also fills in health care gaps for low-income older adults, by covering services that Medicare does not cover, such as dental, vision, hearing, and non-emergency medical transportation, enabling individuals without other transportation options to keep medical appointments and avoid costly emergency room visits. For older adults struggling to afford Medicare, Medicaid assists with premiums and cost-sharing. Medicaid is a significant driver of the economy nationwide, improving the financial performances of hospitals – especially small and rural hospitals – and other health care providers. Any cuts to Medicaid would negatively impact health care for older Americans, including access to affordable Medicare.

Strengthen Medicare

The Medicare program is vital to over 59 million Americans age 65 and older, as well as nearly 8 million Americans with disabilities, enabling beneficiaries to maintain their health, well-being, and independence as they age. Medicare enjoys widespread popularity among the American public and serves as a key driver of quality treatment protocols, medical innovation, and economic stability for both beneficiaries and the healthcare sector. Medicare provides good value for public spending, with an impressive medical loss ratio of approximately 98%.

Access to comprehensive primary care services, along with early diagnosis and treatment (including of mental health conditions and substance use disorders), and management of chronic conditions are essential to our shared goals of lowering costs, promoting healthier more independent lives for older adults and people with disabilities, and strengthening families, and communities. Medicare's coverage of vaccines reduces risks for older adults of hospitalizations and complications from infectious disease. We ask you to protect this coverage and preserve Part D reforms that have made prescription drugs more accessible and affordable.

We also urge you to ensure that individuals with Medicare continue to have affordable access to the health care providers they choose and to keep out-of-pocket costs low by maintaining Medicare's large risk pool. For individuals selecting a Medicare Advantage plan, we ask that you improve information for enrollees regarding provider networks, prior authorization requirements, and unintended consequences, such as potential ineligibility for Medigap coverage if an individual later opts for traditional Medicare. We look forward to working with you and Congress to create Age-Friendly Health Systems that support individual choices and priorities regarding the care that people receive as they age, support unpaid caregivers, and to expand the critical caregiving workforce. Additionally, we urge you to partner with Congress to add coverage for essential benefits in Medicare, such as dental, vision, and hearing services, which can play a crucial role in preventing or delaying costly health issues, including Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Preserve and Expand HUD Section 202 Housing and Service Coordination

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Section 202 housing program is the only program that provides stability, affordability, and service coordination for older adults with extremely low incomes. Over 400,000 residents currently live in HUD Section 202 properties, but the waitlists are long and continue to grow. Section 202 residents have an average annual income of approximately \$14,000 and high rates of chronic health conditions, which make the preservation of existing affordable, service-enriched properties essential.

In a 2023 HUD Study, older adults made up almost 20% of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Among those older adults who are fortunate enough to have access to housing, an all-time high of 11.2 million older adult households spent more than 30% of their income on housing expenses, and more than half of those spent more than 50% of their income on housing.

On-site HUD Section 202 Service Coordinators provide critical assistance for residents, connecting them with wellness programming, home care aides, assistance with benefits, food banks, and other desperately needed community-based resources. Affordable, accessible housing with services is an important part of our continuum of care and costs significantly less than nursing home care. Unfortunately, half of all HUD Section 202 housing properties that are eligible for service coordination do not have an on-site service coordinator due to inadequate funding.

The HUD Section 202 program offers a nationwide, easily replicable and effective model for housing and service coordination to allow low-income older adults to age-in-place in rural, suburban, and urban communities. We encourage the incoming administration to protect existing HUD and USDA properties for older adults and to expand affordable housing and on-site service coordination for our aging population.

Preserving and Strengthening Medicaid Long Term Services and Supports

Medicaid enables nearly 5.6 million older adults and people with disabilities to obtain long-term services and supports (LTSS). Medicaid funded LTSS are critical in supporting individuals to remain at home and access nursing home care when necessary.

Medicaid's LTSS programs must deliver high-quality care across all settings, ensuring that older adults and people with disabilities receive services that uphold their rights, provide robust protections and promote positive health outcomes. Necessary to this commitment is the availability of adequate staff trained and equipped to meet the diverse needs of LTSS recipients, regardless of where they live. Additional efforts are also needed to strengthen the rights of recipients in order to prevent discrimination against people with Medicaid, enhance transparency, and support informed decision-making.

Medicaid is already a lean and efficient program, and we strongly oppose any efforts to cut its funding. Cuts to Medicaid LTSS funding means fewer staff, poor training, and fewer resources to meet the needs of an ever-increasing aging population. In the long run, cuts to Medicaid will lead to increased costs, as decreased LTSS access results in worsened health outcomes, increases reliance on more costly institutional care, and places a greater burden on programs like Medicare.

Fostering Older Adult Independence, Safety, and Dignity

We look forward to working with you and Congress on strengthening the cost-effective programs enabling older adults to live in a community of their choosing. The rising older adult population presents challenges such as social isolation, increased health risks, preventable age-related vision loss, increased financial exploitation, food insecurity, and many others. However, the Older Americans Act (OAA), Elder Justice Act, and other aging programs provide efficient and innovative solutions. These programs build quality of life, improve our country's fiscal future and promote efficiencies within the health care system by preventing unnecessary hospital stays, reducing readmission rates, increasing care coordination, and managing care transitions. We look forward to collaborating on the implementation of the recently promulgated OAA and Adult Protective Services (APS) programs rules to further build effective and transparent systems. We urge the Administration to recognize the importance of these programs in the lives of older adults across the country.

Investing in Services for Older Adults

Recognizing the importance of programs serving older adults, we urge the Administration to support appropriate levels of funding to create the most effective programs pursuing innovations, such as public-private partnerships that leverage dollars to effectively support older adults. The nation's aging population faces significant costs that can be addressed through innovations in risk reduction that support healthy aging. Nearly 95% of older adults have a chronic condition, with the majority having two or more. Chronic conditions overall make up 90% of the nation's health care costs but only 3% of health care dollars are spent on prevention. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can provide an average benefit of \$118 a month for an older adult and is linked to at least a 25% reduction in health care costs.⁴ Over half of all who qualify for SNAP do not participate, thereby losing the healthcare savings and benefits to the local economy.⁵ Similarly concerning, an estimated one in ten older adults will experience maltreatment with significant impacts on healthcare and services, but limited funding is provided to Adult Protective Services and Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs. Older Americans Act, Elder Justice Act, and other aging services programs are both cost saving and lifesaving but face staffing and resource challenges without full funding.

Adequately Fund the Administration of Social Security Programs

Social Security benefits are critical to aging Americans and LCAO is concerned about the long wait times to get assistance at Social Security Administration (SSA) offices. In 2024, the average wait time to get a call answered was over 30 minutes and over 231 days to receive a disability benefit decision. Around 30,000 Americans died while waiting for their disability benefit decision, and thousands more were forced into bankruptcy. We encourage the administration to fully fund SSA so that it can better serve the American public. SSA employee benefits should match other federal agencies to reduce high attrition rates, given that the agency loses nearly 20% of its highly trained teleservice call center workers each year, hampering efforts to improve service. Americans paid into Social Security to earn their benefits; they should be able to access these benefits in their time of need. We urge your administration to fully fund SSA.

Increase the Asset Limit for Supplemental Security Income

In addition, LCAO urges the Administration to increase the asset limit for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients. The asset limit for SSI recipients is \$2,000 for an individual and \$3,000 for a married couple, a figure that has not been updated since 1989 despite recent years of high inflation and is evidently not enough for beneficiaries to weather an emergency. Moreover, administering the asset test is burdensome for both SSA and claimants. Though less than 10% of SSI

recipients have \$500 or more in savings, a higher limit would encourage savings, rather than penalize good financial habits. This is why the 8 CEOs of America's largest banks and many groups from many different political perspectives have joined LCAO in advocating for Sen. Cassidy's (R-LA) bill to increase the asset limit to \$10,000. Updating this number is long overdue and LCAO encourages the Trump administration to support the growing bipartisan movement to increase SSI asset limits.

In Conclusion

We of the LCAO look forward to working with you to protect Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid and the programs under the Older Americans Act as well as other critical programs which foster the safety and dignity of all of us as we age. We ask you to support the housing and long-term services and supports programs which improve the quality of life, fully fund SSA, and raise the SSI asset limit to a reasonable level.

Finally, we note that approximately every 10 years since 1961, the White House Conference on Aging has been held to assess the needs of and opportunities for Older Americans. We would like to work with you to continue this tradition and create a forum to bring older Americans, their advocates, caregivers, and leaders together to help shape the landscape for a brighter future as we all age. Thank you for your consideration of these priorities for the well-being of older Americans.

Sincerely,



Debra Whitman, Chair, LCAO

cc: Executive Office of the President

Domestic Policy Council

OMB

Endnotes

1. B. Kakulla, AARP Research, Increasing Longevity Has an Economic Impact, January 30, 2020. Available at <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/work-finances-retirement/economics-aging/longevity-economy-outlook/>
2. Ibid.
3. U.S. Census Bureau, Age and Sex Composition: 2020. Available at <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/2020/census-briefs/c2020br-06.pdf>
4. S. Carlson, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs, January 17, 2018. Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-%20care-costs>
5. National Council on Aging, 7 Facts About Older Adults and SNAP, April 11, 2024. Available at <https://www.ncoa.org/article/7-facts-about-older-adults-and-snap/>