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Summary of Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015

This legislation reauthorizes the Older Americans Act of 1965, a federal law with longstanding bipartisan support. The law provides for the organization and delivery of social and nutrition services to older Americans and their caregivers.

This bill reauthorizes programs through 2018 and includes provisions that aim to protect vulnerable elders by strengthening the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program and existing elder abuse screening and prevention efforts. The bill also promotes the delivery of evidence-based programs, such as falls prevention and chronic disease self-management programs. The reauthorization streamlines federal level administration of programs, promotes the efficient and effective use of transportation services, and improves coordination between programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

Elder Abuse

- To be consistent with current law, updates definitions of “adult protective services,” “abuse,” “exploitation and financial exploitation,” and “elder justice”
- Improves coordination of activities between the state and local aging offices
- Promotes best practices related to responding to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation in long-term care facilities through the Administration on Aging
- Promotes States’ submission of data concerning elder abuse
- Directs the Administration on Aging to include, as appropriate, training for States, area agencies on aging, and service providers on elder abuse prevention and screening

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

- Allows ombudsmen to serve all residents of long-term care facilities, regardless of age
- Ensures private, unimpeded access to the ombudsman for all residents of long-term care facilities
- Provides for identification and resolution of potential individual and organizational conflicts of interest
- Clarifies the role of ombudsman program in advocating for residents unable to communicate their wishes
- Clarifies that ombudsman may continue to serve residents transitioning from a long-term care facility to a home care setting
- Clarifies that the ombudsman office is a “health oversight agency” for purposes of HIPAA

Title III Grants to States Formula

- To account for geographic changes in the older population, adjusts the formula for the Title III programs of supportive services, congregate meals, home meals, and preventive services.
- The formula adjustment would update the 2006 hold harmless by using the most recent fiscal year funding as a baseline for an annual dynamic hold harmless, reflecting more recent population trends and ensuring funding better meets the nationwide needs of older adults while also protecting every state from experiencing a negative adjustment of no more than 1 percent a year. After three years, the formula’s hold harmless would again freeze in place at FY2018 funding levels. Minimum grant states are not affected.

Transportation Services

- Directs the Assistant Secretary to provide information and technical assistance to States, area agencies on aging, and service providers on providing efficient, person-centered, transportation services, including across geographic boundaries

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)

- Improves ADRC coordination with area agencies on aging and other community-based entities in disseminating information regarding available home and community-based services for individuals who are at risk for, or currently residing in, institutional settings
- Updates the definition of “Aging and Disability Resource Center” to be consistent with current practice and current law, including an emphasis on independent living and home and community-based services

Health and Economic Welfare

- Makes clear the Assistant Secretary’s responsibilities related to the development of plans, program implementation, and preparation and dissemination of education materials on the health and economic welfare of older individuals

Senior Centers

- Directs the Assistant Secretary to provide information and technical assistance to support best practices for the modernization of multipurpose senior centers
- Encourages efforts to modernize multipurpose senior centers and promote intergenerational models

National Family Caregiver Support Program

- Clarifies current law that older adults caring for adult children with disabilities and older adults raising children under 18 are eligible to participate in the Family Caregiver Support Program

Preventing Fraud and Abuse

- Continues support for Medicare program integrity initiative that trains senior volunteers to prevent and identify healthcare fraud and abuse

Administration Demonstration Authority

- Streamlines the Act by eliminating three outdated demo programs: Computer Training, Multidisciplinary Centers and Multidisciplinary Systems, and Ombudsman and Advocacy Demonstration Projects

Home Care

- Directs the Assistant Secretary to develop a consumer-friendly tool, when feasible, to assist older individuals and their families in choosing home and community-based services

Emphasis on Evidence-based Programs

- Ensures that, in accordance with current practice, disease prevention and health promotion programs are “evidence-based”
- Encourages the delivery of falls prevention and chronic disease self-management programs
- Mentions the aging network may include oral health screenings among disease prevention and health promotion activities
- Directs the Assistant Secretary to provide technical assistance and share best practices to improve collaboration and coordination with health care entities, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers, to enhance care coordination for individuals with multiple chronic illnesses

Nutrition Services

- When feasible, encourages the use of locally grown foods in meals programs
- Clarifies that, as appropriate, supplemental foods may be part of a home delivered meal at the option of a nutrition services provider

Mental Health

- Updates references of mental health to also include “behavioral health,” as appropriate to reflect the Aging Network’s current practice

Holocaust Survivors

- Directs the Assistant Secretary to develop guidance on serving Holocaust survivors through Older Americans Act programs