

Social Supports

Position Statement

Generations United's mission demands an active voice before Congress and the Administration on social programs that best support the multigenerational needs of families and communities. The federal government, in partnership with state and local governments and thousands of nonprofit organizations across the country, has long directed resources to important social programs supporting citizens of all ages. The increased flexibility and responsibility of state governments to use federal funds in domestic programs should not compromise the access to or quality of services and should be tied to improved outcomes for the people such services are supposed to help. Generations United (GU) is committed to advocating for continued federal involvement in effective social programs that protect and support people in need - from the very youngest and most vulnerable, to the oldest and frailest of our nation's people. We believe a healthy society can and should meet the basic needs of all generations and make investments in their wellbeing in both times of economic hardship and prosperity.

Intergenerational Intersection

Generations United supports federal involvement in programs that recognize younger and older people as resources for their communities. These social support programs should provide opportunities for younger and older generations to interact and serve one another in paid, stipend, and volunteer positions, including older adult involvement in high-quality early childhood education.

Generations United supports:

- *Intergenerational civic engagement through policies that expand the number and diversity of volunteers in quality intergenerational programs and increase the number of innovative intergenerational program opportunities, including those that reach out to boomers.*
- *Increased funding for programs with intergenerational components, especially those expanding service and innovative work opportunities for older adults, including boomers.*
- *Funding the multigenerational and civic engagement activities authorized under the Older Americans Act at a level reflecting the importance of these programs to the individuals receiving and providing support, and society as a whole.*
- *Funding for and expansion of opportunities for young and old through the Corporation for National and Community Service, including removing barriers and increasing incentives to engage millions of adults age 55 and older in service to benefit children, youth, and families; and providing strong opportunities for youth to volunteer in programs that improve the lives of older adults. The Silver Scholarship Program offering transferable education awards to certain adult volunteers age 55 and older should be included.*
- *Strengthening the Senior Corps programs by raising the income threshold and lowering the age requirement for Foster Grandparents, making the program funds competitive and emphasizing outcomes.*
- *Restoring full funding to the Social Services Block Grant.*

- *Reforming the child welfare system to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children, especially those who come to the attention of child welfare providers.*
- *Passage of a comprehensive elder justice bill to ensure older adults have vital protections from abuse and fraud.*
- *Federal funding to help create nationwide access to 2-1-1, the national telephone number for access to community services and volunteer opportunities, making it easier for people of all ages to give and receive assistance.*
- *Initiatives to strengthen and expand nutrition programs serving children and adults in early care and education, adult care, and school settings; as well as senior nutrition programs, especially on shared sites where children and seniors interact and share resources.*
- *Improving access, especially for low-income working families, to high-quality early childhood programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start, child care, and voluntary universal birth to school-age early education and care programs. GU supports Head Start's comprehensive, high performance standards and Outcomes Framework and the expansion of Early Head Start to serve more vulnerable infants and toddlers. GU also supports quality early childhood home visitation programs to support families and children most in need.*



Photo credit: Pedro Centano

activities. Two types of grants are highlighted: support for grandparents and other older individuals who care for children and support for volunteers helping families of disabled children. Funding levels should reflect the importance of these programs to the individuals receiving support and to society in general. The Act also calls for the Assistant Secretary for Aging to develop a comprehensive strategy to involve older individuals in efforts to address critical local needs of national concern. No such strategy has been produced, although the Administration on Aging and Corporation for National and Community Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

Demonstration Projects

Demonstration projects such as those included in the OAA provide an opportunity for innovative programs that recognize seniors as resources for their communities, and successful programs such as Experience Corps and the Family Friends Program have emerged. Experience Corps builds on the capacities of older adults and engages them in leadership to strengthen ties between the schools, youth-serving organizations, and communities. Family

"And in the end it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

Abraham Lincoln

Background

Multigenerational and Civic Engagement Programs in the Older Americans Act (OAA)

The 2006 reauthorization of the OAA added civic engagement to the existing section for demonstration, support, and research projects for multigenerational

Friends is an intergenerational family support program involving volunteers age 55 years and older in making weekly visits to the homes of families who have children with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Corporation for National and Community Service

The Corporation for National and Community Service administers programs that tap the experience and skills of older and younger people to help others through structured volunteer and stipend service and include:

- *Senior Corps - offering a range of opportunities for intergenerational interaction and service. The program engages more than a half-million older Americans in service to their communities as volunteers or in exchange for small stipends through three main programs: Senior Companion Program, Foster Grandparent Program, and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). These programs would expand under proposed legislation. The intergenerational components of this program include:*
 - ❖ *Foster Grandparent Program – Foster Grandparents serve children in need through locally managed programs, that place and monitor volunteers helping in schools, child care agencies, health care programs and other local agencies. This program currently restricts eligibility for stipends to volunteers who live at or under 125 percent of poverty. Increasing the level of income eligibility to 200 percent of poverty and lowering the age requirement from 60 to 55 would allow higher rates of recruitment, benefiting more people.*
 - ❖ *Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) – RSVP volunteers provide a wide variety of community supports to*

people of all ages serving in local agency volunteer positions to which they are referred by local RSVP sponsors. The age requirement, 60 and older, should be reduced to age 55 to stimulate more volunteering in the post-midlife career phase.

- *AmeriCorps - another major component of the Corporation for National and Community Service involving 75,000 adults of all ages in addressing community problems. The majority of members are young adults who serve full-time for one or two years. The Serve America Act would add new programs for 125,000 more members, of whom at least 10 percent would be age 55 and older, to serve in four program areas: education, anti-poverty, environment, and health. It emphasizes innovative and outcomes-focused programs.*
- *Learn and Serve America - the third component engaging nearly two million young people and adults in service in areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs, including services to older adults. Proposed national service legislation aims to expand the Learn and Serve Program and/or add new components of service for school-age participants. These service programs often provide valuable opportunities for young people to help or serve alongside older adults. The programs could also incorporate opportunities for older adults to mentor youth in service and civic responsibilities.*

A number of bills related to national service were introduced in 2008, including the Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act, the Serve America Act, the Encore Services Act, and

The Corporation for National and Community Service, through the National Senior Service Corps, administers programs that tap the experience and skills of older adults to help others, engaging more than a half million older Americans in service to their communities.

the Summer of Service Act. Each of these bills contains provisions to strengthen the intergenerational fabric of American communities while also increasing volunteer support for people in need.

In March 2009, the House passed the GIVE Act, and the Senate passed its version of the bill, renamed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. Both reauthorize, modernize, and strengthen the Corporation for National and Community Service and provide funding for innovative programs, including the Summer of Service. The House accepted the Senate's bill, and the President signed it on April 21, 2009.

It is important the 111th Congress monitor how the Corporation implements the law's broad mix of provisions to meet the new administration's priority goals for citizen engagement. Provisions of special interest in one or more of these include: targeting 10 percent of AmeriCorps programs for adults age 55 and older; allowing education awards to be transferrable to younger people from AmeriCorps members age 55 and older; changes in the term limits; new programs with intergenerational benefits (Volunteer Generation Fund, Encore Fellows program, Youth Empowerment Zone, and Summer of Service); and the Silver Scholarship Program, which provides scholarship grants to volunteers age 55 and older who meet certain criteria and who may use these grants to contribute to a college fund for a young person, thus increasing community investment in higher education. In several areas, the law specifically prioritizes and encourages intergenerational approaches.

Additional temporary funding was included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to involve volunteers in programs that protect and support children, older adults, people with disabilities, and families in times of need.

Social Services Block Grant

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Title XX of the Social Security Act enacted in 1975, was intended to be the primary source of federal funds for social services. SSBG provides critical flexible funding for important social services for people of all ages, including adult and child day care, adult and child protective services, special services for disabled persons, meals programs, employment preparation, and transportation. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SSBG is used by states, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to address unique community needs by supplementing social service programs and leveraging additional funding and resources. In 2006, SSBG assisted almost 19 million individuals, including over 11 million children and approximately six million adults. The five largest categories of services supported by SSBG in the last five years have been child care, foster care, adult protective services, child protective services, and specialized services for individuals with disabilities.²⁰

Federal funding for SSBG was set at \$2.5 billion annually in 1974. By 1977, annual funding had increased to almost \$2.8 billion. Since 1998, however, Congress has funded SSBG below its authorized level. By FY 2005, SSBG funding was \$1.7 billion, a reduction of over \$1 billion in the program since FY 1996. This reduction represents a reversal of a commitment made in 1996 when SSBG was originally cut that funding would be restored to \$2.8 billion in 2003. Fortunately, Congress has rejected proposals for further cuts.

Service providers rely on SSBG as a vital source of funding. As SSBG funding has steadily deteriorated, states have been forced to roll back critical human services. States are now expected to cut key human services programs even further to address

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significant budget shortfalls because of the deepening recession. As the economic downturn continues and more families face homelessness and unemployment, the need for these human services intensifies. Congress should restore full funding to SSBG to help states, localities, providers, and vulnerable people during this difficult economic period. Congress should further increase funding to adjust for the current rate of inflation to help states and local governments better meet the needs of their communities in times of economic stress.

Child Welfare Services

The Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act) is the major source of federal support for child welfare. Other federal funds that also support child welfare include SSBG, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). States supplement these federal funds with state funds to implement activities such as prevention and supportive services for children who are not eligible for federal assistance.

Title IV-E provides federal reimbursement for some of the federally eligible foster care or adoption expenses states have already paid. It is an entitlement linked to the number of eligible children, with no cap on federal funding. Reimbursement is provided for room and board costs associated with foster care and adoption assistance placements, administrative costs which support caseworker planning and provision of some services, and training for the child welfare workforce. Federal funding for foster care programs was \$5.067 billion in FY 2008.²¹

To move forward with a new vision and course of action that ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children, especially those who come to the attention of the child welfare system, states and community-based agencies need to have tools and resources

in place to make certain children are protected. GU supports comprehensive reform of the child welfare system to make sure that states and community-based agencies serving children have the flexibility and new federal financial investments to implement needed improvements and expand services. This comprehensive reform must include a review of all federal funding that supports child welfare.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) was signed into law on October 7, 2008, which constitutes a first step towards comprehensive reform. The law includes several provisions sought by GU and relative caregivers, including state options to use Title IV-E for subsidized guardianship payments, kinship navigator programs, and efforts to clarify that states may use alternative licensing standards for relative caregivers.

Key elements of reform must preserve and make more children eligible for the basic safety net of federal assistance offered through the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program. Other key elements of reform include expanding guaranteed federal financial support for child welfare services for a broad array of services beyond out-of-home care including prevention, child protective services, in-home supports, treatment foster care, residential treatment, reunification, post-permanency, and post-adoption services.

Elder Justice

Elder abuse is a growing problem in this country and yet is too often invisible, misunderstood, or ignored, in part because prevention and enforcement efforts are under-funded. An estimated 80 percent of elder abuse cases go unreported.²² The 1987 Amendments to the Older Americans Act included the first federal definitions of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation; but these are solely guidelines and not legally

enforceable. State laws vary widely; but in general, there are three basic categories of elder abuse: domestic, institutional, and self-neglect. Within this framework, elder abuse can be physical, sexual or psychological abuse, neglect by one's self or other caretakers, and financial exploitation.

The aging of boomers, along with an increase in rates of Alzheimer's disease and resulting strains on professional and family caregivers alike, will likely exacerbate the problem of elder abuse. Federal response to this urgent national issue has been deficient.

Despite bipartisan support for multiple proposed elder justice measures, Congress has yet to enact a comprehensive bill to bring resources, research, training, infrastructure, programs, and policy development to bear on this form of abuse. GU supports the passage of a comprehensive elder justice measure to ensure that all vulnerable Americans are adequately protected from abuse.

Nationwide 2-1-1

Every hour of every day, someone needs essential services – from finding an after-school program to securing adequate care for a child or an aging parent. Faced with a dramatic increase in the number of agencies and help-lines, people often do not know where to turn. In many cases, people go without necessary services because they do not know where to find information. 2-1-1 helps people get and give help.

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember and recognizable number that makes a critical connection between individuals and families seeking services or volunteer opportunities, and appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. 2-1-1 makes it possible for people of all ages to navigate the complex and ever-growing maze of human services agencies and programs.

2-1-1 now reaches 75 percent of the

population.²³ Current funding where 2-1-1 is operational comes from diverse sources, including nonprofit organizations, state and local governments, foundations, and businesses. A nationwide 2-1-1 system will not be established without the support of the federal government, in partnership with states. GU supports the bipartisan Calling for 2-1-1 Act and will continue to advocate for it when it is reintroduced in the 111th Congress.

Nutrition Programs

Many working parents and grandparent caregivers rely on community resources to help care for their children in early care and education programs and before-and after-school hours. Many of these programs can be operated in a shared site, encouraging children and seniors to interact and share resources. Federally funded nutrition programs are critical supports for children, youth, and older adults in these settings. Federal support for these programs is particularly important during the current recession as many families struggle to meet basic needs, including adequate nutrition.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

CACFP is a federal nutrition program that provides reimbursements for meals served to low-income children in before- and after-school programs, summer programs, child care centers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and family child care homes, as well as to adults who are in adult day care programs. CACFP requires participating sites to be "geographically or enrollment eligible" to qualify. This means schools or programs must either be located in an area in which 50 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced price school meals or 50 percent of the children enrolled in the program must be documented to qualify for

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free or reduced price school meals. Anyone attending a school program for people with disabilities, regardless of age, may also participate. Since eligibility requirements mandate 50 percent of participants or local residents have a family income of no more than 185 percent of poverty, many poor children and adults are excluded. Lowering the threshold to 40 percent would help reach many of the low-income younger and older individuals who currently do not qualify because of where they live. Additionally, while adult day care centers can qualify for CACFP, they often under-use the program because complex regulations limit access.

Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The WIC program provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals for health care and social services to low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. In response to the growing demand for WIC services in the deteriorating economy, the ARRA will direct additional, temporary funding to WIC. However, it is essential that the WIC program have continued capacity to meet ever-growing needs and expand access to newly-eligible women and children. Adjusting regulations governing categorical eligibility, application procedures, and program and paperwork requirements can increase access to both the CACFP and WIC programs. Food packages and benefits provided by both these programs should be regularly updated to reflect current nutrition science and fully funded to ensure benefits adequately cover the cost of a healthy diet.

Nutrition Supports for Older Adults

Over three million older Americans participate in senior meal programs each year under the Older Americans Act, Title III C. Meals are provided to individuals who

need them most. Seventy-three percent of home-delivered meal recipients are at high nutritional risk, and 62 percent of them receive half or more of their daily food intake from their home-delivered meal. Forty-three percent of congregate meal recipients are at high nutritional risk, and 58 percent receive half or more of the daily food intake from their congregate meal.²⁴

In addition to seniors participating in nutrition services under the Older Americans Act (OAA), an estimated four million more older Americans suffer from food insecurity or the inability to afford, prepare, or acquire food.²⁵ Good nutrition is essential to maintain cognitive and physical functions and plays a crucial role in the prevention or management of many chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Providing nutrition services to ethnic minority older adults is especially important since they tend to have higher incidences of chronic disease. Recent price increases for food and fuel have further compounded the problem of years of funding levels which have not kept pace with inflation or the growing aging population, leaving many programs struggling to meet the needs of current elders, even as new clients seek assistance in rising numbers. Older adults are cutting back on food, medications, and other necessities because of the effects of the financial crisis and faltering economy.

The ARRA provides funding for senior nutrition programs, including congregate nutrition services and home-delivered meals. Resources should continue to be directed to senior nutrition programs to meet the increasing demand for congregate and home-delivered meals because of the growth of the 85 and older population, which is expected to triple over the next several decades.²⁶ It is also important to acknowledge that while the main goal of the OAA nutrition program is to feed older

persons in need, it also plays an invaluable role in giving participating seniors opportunities to socialize and remain engaged in their community and is a life-saving opportunity to provide the isolated senior with regular human contact.

High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

Head Start is a child development and early education program that has served low-income preschool-aged children and their families since 1965. Head Start approaches the needs of the whole child and the family by providing health, education, social services, and parent-community involvement in one comprehensive program. The program's clear emphasis on family and community involvement has intergenerational implications. Parents and caregivers are active in the planning and implementation of activities, serve on policy councils and committees that make administrative decisions, participate in classes and workshops on child development, and volunteer in the program. In addition, Head Start provides outreach to families to determine what other services and supports they might need in order to succeed. This comprehensive family- and community-based approach can be especially critical for grandparents and other relative caregivers who might need additional assistance.

Recognizing that disparities in children's cognitive and social abilities become evident well before they enter Head Start or pre-kindergarten programs, the federal government expanded the Head Start program in 1994 to serve low-income infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. Early Head Start's mission is clear: to support healthy prenatal outcomes and enhance the cognitive, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers in order to promote later success in school and life. Now more than 745 programs serve over 85,000 low-



Photo credit: Angela S.

income families with infants and toddlers and more than 10,000 pregnant women.²⁷

Despite its growth, current funding for Head Start can assist less than half of all eligible young children while Early Head Start reaches less than three percent of all eligible infants and toddlers.²⁸ Significant funding increases are necessary in order to maintain, strengthen, and expand these high-quality programs as well as institute new initiatives and training mandated by the reauthorization of Head Start and Early Head Start in 2007.

Like Head Start and Early Head Start, demand for child care services still far outstrips the availability of programs that meet high quality standards and provide services for different work schedules of families. Across the nation, child care fees average \$4,000 to \$15,000 per year, making it increasingly difficult for low-income families to access high-quality programs.²⁹ The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is helping to promote access to child care for low-income working families; yet only one of every seven families who are financially eligible for child care subsidies receive them.³⁰

Research shows that high-quality early childhood programs result in better outcomes for children, particularly those in low-income

families.³¹ Head Start, Early Head Start, pre-k, and child care programs offer unique opportunities for older adult volunteers to assist program directors and provide additional one-on-one attention to children. The ARRA directs temporary funding to Head Start, Early Head Start, and CCDBG. However, substantial and sustained increases in federal funding are required for Head Start, Early Head Start, and CCDBG to reach their full potential; and vital political and financial support is needed for expanded access to early childhood and pre-k programs.

Home visitation is another key approach for engaging families in addressing their children's developmental needs, preparing children for school, and preventing child abuse and neglect. Home visitation programs recognize the need to work collaboratively with the entire family and community. A number of high-quality early childhood home visitation programs have yielded a range of positive outcomes for children and families. Because they have different areas of focus, different models may

have a stronger impact on some outcomes than others, including improving a child's readiness for and success in school, improving child health and development, improving parenting practices, and reducing child maltreatment. The Harvard Family Research Project found that overall, home visitation shows clear benefits that outweigh the cost of running the programs and services, with monetary benefits to society ranging from \$1.26 to as much as \$17.07 for every dollar spent.³² Larger dollar benefits are seen over time in lower public expenditures related to crime and delinquency, and higher earnings among those served.³³ In order to expand access to high-quality home visitation programs and ensure connections to other comprehensive child and family services, additional federal resources are necessary.