

Intergenerational Opportunities in the Older Americans Act



Overview

In 1965, Congress enacted the Older Americans Act (OAA) to provide grants to states to develop and improve services and programs to help older people. The services and programs provided by the OAA have made notable differences in the lives of millions of older adults and those who care about them. Throughout its 54-year lifespan, Congress has modified and amended the act through the reauthorization process to ensure that older individuals maintain maximum independence in their homes and communities. Previous reauthorizations have also added and expanded opportunities for intergenerational programs.

Intergenerational programs encourage young and old to share their talents and resources and support each other in relationships that benefit both populations and the community as a whole.

Current Context

The OAA is currently up for reauthorization. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives have shown interest in expanding upon the intergenerational opportunities in the act. Bipartisan legislation—The Dignity in Aging Act (H.R. 4334)—to reauthorize the OAA was introduced in the House in September and passed out of the Committee on Education and Labor. The Senate released a bipartisan draft reauthorization bill in June 2019. The following identifies intergenerational opportunities currently available in the Older Americans Act and new opportunities in these proposals under consideration by the House and Senate.

National Family Caregiver Support Program –

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) provides grants to state agencies on aging that award funds to area agencies on aging (AAA's) for caregiver support. The NFCSP was among the first intergenerational additions to the OAA and has allowed various family caregivers to qualify for support, including grandparents and other relatives age 55 and older who are raising children. NFCSP support services include: educating caregivers on what services are available; assisting caregivers in accessing the services; individual counseling; organizing support groups or caregiver trainings; respite care; and supplemental services that complement care provided by the caregiver. Currently, there is a 10% cap on the funds that can be spent on grandparents and other relatives raising children.

The House reauthorization bill and draft Senate bill would remove the 10% cap and allow states to determine how to use their funds to best meet the needs of their communities. The Senate proposal also allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to

award funds for activities of national significance that improve supports provided to older caregivers.

Grant Program for Multigenerational Collaboration –

The OAA currently has a grant program to encourage projects that focus on multigenerational collaboration. Both House and Senate proposals improve this existing program and emphasize the variety of ways these projects can help multiple generations. They include text that specifies that these programs can and should reduce social isolation which occurs most commonly in the youngest and oldest generations. The language specifically names key goals and components of intergenerational activities to be developed when carrying out projects such as creating meaningful roles for participants, ensuring reciprocity in relationship-building, promoting life-long learning, reducing social isolation and building social connectedness. The proposals also specify that programs supporting older caregivers of children including kinship navigator programs would qualify for these grants. The grant period for these programs

is at least three years. **The proposals specify that programs serving both young and old should be prioritized and that the Assistant Secretary shall give preference to shared site programs such as co-located childcare and long-term care facilities.** It also identifies that qualifying organizations operating the grants shall use multigenerational coordinators.

Transportation – The OAA has historically supported programs that make transportation accessible to older adults.

The reauthorization proposals include support for existing and new programs to modernize their provision of services. The drafts include technological updates and encourage transportation programs to identify opportunities to share resources to reduce costs of transportation services. One way to share costs for these transportation services is by using an intergenerational model and creating a program that benefits multiple generations.

Interagency Coordinating Committee on Healthy Aging and Age-Friendly Communities –

The reauthorization proposals would modernize the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Healthy Aging and include support for age-friendly communities so older adults can age in place. The proposed language requires the committee to seek input from nonprofits and other community organizations. This offers an opportunity for intergenerational programs to share their knowledge and expertise to help make their communities more all ages-friendly. The proposals define age-friendly communities as those that allow older adults to participate fully in their communities by giving them the supports to do so including through social opportunities, civic participation, volunteerism, all of which offer avenues for intergenerational connections.

Nutrition – Nutrition programs have been a longstanding part of the OAA. The act authorizes

congregate nutrition programs designed not only to provide healthy meals but also to present opportunities for social engagement, provide information on healthy aging and to offer meaningful volunteer roles. The act encourages where feasible, “joint arrangements with schools and other facilities serving meals to children in order to promote intergenerational meal programs.”

The reauthorization proposals include an amendment to the nutrition section that encourages states, in consultation with area agencies on aging, to reduce the administrative burden for these programs and help direct limited resources to where services are needed most. This could potentially benefit communities using intergenerational meal program models.

Report on Social Isolation – The reauthorization proposals include a provision requiring the Assistant Secretary for Aging to review existing programs in the OAA to determine if and how they address social need and make recommendations on how programs can improve and address negative impacts associated with social isolation for older adults.

Intergenerational programs, especially shared site programs, have demonstrated their abilities to do just that. A report on social isolation could look at intergenerational programs’ abilities to reduce social isolation for participants.

Extension of Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act

– In 2018 Congress passed the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act which creates a council to examine the needs, supports, and services for families where grandparents and other relatives are raising children. The council, whose activities are authorized through three years from the date of enactment, is charged with issuing a report to Congress on their findings and share information about resources to help the families. The House OAA reauthorization bill would extend the act for an additional year.

For more information on the Older Americans Act and resources on intergenerational programs and grandparents and other relatives raising children visit www.gu.org