

Know Your Rights: The Older Americans Act

The Older Americans Act (OAA), first enacted in 1965 and periodically reauthorized since, is a landmark legislation aimed at addressing the diverse needs of the aging population in the United States. The OAA establishes a range of programs and services designed to promote the well-being, independence, and dignity of older adults.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) mandates the establishment of a network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) across the United States to ensure that older adults have access to essential services and programs at the local level. Each state is required to have at least one AAA, although many states have multiple AAAs, which are organized by regions.

Under the OAA, State Units on Aging (SUAs) are responsible for designating AAAs within their state. The SUAs work in collaboration with the AAAs to develop the State Plan on Aging, which outlines the state's strategy for delivering programs and services to older adults. The State Plan on Aging must be submitted to the Administration for Community Living (ACL) for approval.

The primary function of AAAs is to plan, coordinate, and advocate for the development of a comprehensive service system for older adults within their designated regions. They serve as a local access point for a range of services, including nutrition programs, in-home support, transportation, caregiver support, health promotion, and elder rights protection. AAAs are also responsible for allocating federal, state, and local funds to support these services and programs.

By requiring the existence of AAAs in each state, the Older Americans Act ensures that older adults across the country have access to resources and support tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

Key provisions and guarantees of the OAA include:

- **Nutrition services**

The Act supports programs that provide nutritious meals to older adults, such as Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals.

- **Supportive services**

These services aim to help seniors maintain their independence, such as transportation, in-home assistance, and caregiver support.

- **Health promotion and disease prevention**

The OAA funds evidence-based programs that promote healthy lifestyles and prevent or manage chronic conditions.

- **Elder rights protection**

The Act supports programs that protect seniors from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and also provides legal assistance.

- **National Family Caregiver Support Program**

This program offers resources and support for family members who provide care to older adults.

- **Senior employment opportunities**

The OAA promotes part-time employment and training opportunities for low-income individuals aged 55 and older.

Finding your Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

To access tools and supports under the OAA, older Americans can contact their local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). These agencies can provide information about available services, eligibility, and how to apply for assistance. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) website also offers a wealth of resources and contact information for various OAA programs.

To find their local AAA or ADRC, individuals can:

1. Visit the Eldercare Locator website (eldercare.acl.gov), a public service provided by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). By entering their zip code or city and state, users can access contact information for nearby AAAs and ADRCs.
2. Call the Eldercare Locator hotline at 1-800-677-1116. Trained professionals can provide guidance and connect callers to local resources.
3. Search online for their state's Unit on Aging or Department of Aging website, which often provides a directory of local AAAs and ADRCs. Reaching out to these agencies can help older adults and their families access vital information on programs and services available under the OAA.

****Side note (because we often get asked this question)*

Despite the widespread availability of OAA services, many people remain unaware of them due to several factors:

- Lack of awareness: Insufficient outreach and promotion efforts can result in low public awareness of the programs and services available.
- Stigma: Some older adults may feel hesitant to seek assistance due to social stigmas around aging and dependency.
- Fragmentation: Services may be scattered across different agencies or organizations, making it difficult for people to find the information they need.

About Positive Caregiving:

Positive Caregiving is on a mission to help make caregiving and care receiving a positive experience, a time to savor, and an opportunity for personal growth. For more information visit positivecaregiving.com.

About the Helpful Tools Series:

Locating accurate and timely information remains a persistent challenge for many older adults and caregivers. The Helpful Tools Series by Positive Caregiving aims to simplify this process and empower individuals to concentrate on the positive aspects of aging and caring for older loved ones.