



Advocating for Senior Services

May 6, 2021

As the Ohio legislature considers the biennial state budget bill, the aging network advocates for two main priorities to support seniors remaining within their communities. These are higher provider reimbursement rates to strengthen the workforce of home care aides, and additional Senior Community Services (SCS) funding to provide supportive community programs.

Home and community-based Medicaid waiver programs are cost-effective options for older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities to live healthy, engaged, secure lives in their preferred choice of home. However, service providers are experiencing significant challenges in staffing enough personal care aides to meet these needs and are dropping out. Without the ability to provide personal care services in the community because of this lack of providers, eligible participants are turned away or dis-enrolled, or go immediately into full skilled nursing care when that is not necessarily what they need or want.

There are currently more than 2,000 Ohioans eligible for in-home services who cannot access care due to provider shortages stemming from inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates. The Agency joins the Ohio Association for Area Agencies on Aging's support for an additional 1% increase for the fiscal year 2022 budget and 5% in 2023 for community nursing and aide services in the ODM and ODA-administered waivers, including assisted living and state plan services. This increase addresses the historic underfunding of home and community-based services and assists in recovery from the damage to services caused by Covid-19.

Area Agencies on Aging across the country have championed the promotion and expansion of home and community-based services for over 40 years while saving the state an estimated \$12 billion. "These SCS funds provide support for people who are not-Medicaid-eligible by offering home-delivered meals, personal care, transportation, and similar services to help keep older adults in their homes and communities for as long as possible," said Doug McGarry, Executive Director of the Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2.

McGarry notes that all supportive senior services are important and acknowledges it's a balancing act to prioritize funding. He explained that it's a struggle to meet the needs of Ohio's seniors with funding that doesn't keep pace with this growing population. "Our goal is to provide services to those who need them the most, and additional funds will decrease waiting lists for these services. The greater the funding and flexibility at the local level, the better we can do in prioritizing services to meet the needs of our seniors in each county of our region," he said.

Home and community-based services provide all older adults the opportunity to live independently and reduce overall healthcare costs by supporting secure community conditions, healthy living and access to quality care. The state's adequate investment in serving its aging population will help all Ohioans to live longer and more independently within their own choice of home.