



Senior Services Important Part of State Budget Discussions

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As the Ohio legislature considers the biennial state budget bill, the aging network has been advocating for services that support seniors remaining in their community. This includes additional Senior Community Services (SCS) funding that provides supportive community programs and a higher provider reimbursement rate to strengthen the availability of less expensive and preferred long-term care options.

"These non-Medicaid SCS funds provide support 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. "These community and in-home supports help people to live independently."

Duana Patton, President of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, explained in her testimony to the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, that a variety of partnerships and initiatives are used to support seniors in the community and connect them to services. One example is SCS-funded nutrition programs that are known to reduce hunger and food insecurity, but also promote socialization, address health and well-being, and connect participants to other supportive services.

McGarry noted that all supportive senior services are important – SCS-funded community supports and in-home services – and he acknowledged that it is a balancing act to prioritize funding. While he acknowledged the struggle to meet the needs of Ohio's seniors despite funding not keeping pace with that growing population, he stated "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.

In addition to needs exceeding funding, workforce shortage makes it difficult to provide care in the least restrictive setting, whether that is through community supportive programs, in-home assistance,

or assisted living. Low reimbursement rates are cited as a major factor in attracting and retaining adequate staffing to meet the needs of Ohio seniors. Patton stated, "Without the ability to provide the services, eligible participants are turned away or dis-enrolled, and are forced to turn to options much more expensive to the state – nursing facilities supported by Medicaid." She added that commonsense, forward-thinking solutions are needed to address what can become an unsustainable model for long-term services and supports, "putting our state's fiscal health, and the health of all of us as we age, at great risk."

Ohio Area Agencies on Aging support proposals to increase assisted living waiver rates and reimbursement rates for in-home service providers. "We also believe that the state needs a longer term strategic plan that looks at all aspects of the workforce and the need, with specific strategies for building capacity for these important supports," Patton said.