**MISSOURI ASSOCATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON AGING POSITION STATEMENT**

**REGARDING SENIOR SERVICES GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FUND**

**Action Requested:**

***Please support the full funding of the Senior Services Growth and Development Program Fund.***

Recent federal funding (ARPA, CRSSA, CARES) has definitely been helpful at providing relief for the catastrophic consequences of the COVID pandemic. The AAA’s, along with the rest of the world, experienced unforeseen crisis and corresponding funding challenges in the face of COVID. Thankfully some of these challenges were partially mitigated with federal COVID relief funds. We are hopeful that the legislature will allocate the ARPA funds expeditiously so that we can continue to respond to the COVID challenges.

Please keep in mind, while these relief funds are helpful, they are not by any means “extra” funding. These funds have been directed to responding to extraordinary needs caused by COVID. Much of the prior funding was specifically directed to helping our customers access the vaccine as well as for public awareness and promotion of vaccine access. Some of the funding made it possible to support a rapid pivot to the expansion of home delivered meals.

Potential ARPA funding will – if restrictive stipulations can be avoided – provide greatly needed support for infrastructure needs to further respond to the COVID crisis; these funds also could potentially provide the opportunity to develop further infrastructure capacity such as technology resources to meet the changing needs of our clients. This could include increased virtual interaction opportunities as well as updated equipment to provide expanded meal capacity.

ARPA and COVID relief funds, while greatly appreciated and helpful, do not provide anything that supports ongoing services that are mandated by the Older Americans Act. These relief dollars are short-term, temporary sources to meet the crisis-caused needs; as they are temporary, one-time funds, AAA’s cannot build sustainable programs with these. These are intended and will be used to meet the needs of the crisis and to help us expand some critical infrastructure as just mentioned (technology, equipment etc.)

These one-time funding sources do not help us with one of our most urgent needs -the critical worker shortage. They are not sustainable to meet the mandates of increased wages. And they do not offset the explosive growth of costs and inflation. The cost of meals has grown explosively and creates a tremendous burden and challenge for all of the AAAs.

AAA funding has been flat for the past 20 years now. There has been no growth to offset 20 years of inflation, greater expenses, and increased personnel and wage costs. There has been no growth to support the explosion of the aging population. Almost one in five Missourians are 60+, and with the aging population, the growth in the 60+ population is anticipated as a “Silver Tsunami.”

These are our parents, our neighbors and our friends. A growing number of our aging friends have limited options, fixed incomes, and face historic inflation and financial challenges. These friends have worked all of their lives to build stronger communities for us, and now, in their need, they deserve our care.

Without the services the AAAs provide, too many will require institutional care – which is a cost 4 times greater than home and community-based services. That is a cost we will all have to pay and will be financially devastating to our state and community. Beyond the financial toll, we have a social and moral responsibility to support our aging family, friends, and neighbors. They have supported our communities all of their lives, and now they need us.

Some day soon (sooner for some of us!), this will be us. And I certainly hope someone will be there to advocate for me when my time of need comes.

**Please support the full funding of the Senior Services Growth and Development Program Fund.**

This law was passed with overwhelming, bi-partisan support and signed by the Governor. It is Law! The SGDPF does not add any additional taxes, it does not add expense to the state of Missouri. It is the law and should be funded as intended. This is a fund that will provide reliable and sustainable funding to support the ongoing services of the AAAs.

The SGDPF will help AAAs address the state and federal wage mandates, will help address the historic inflation and higher costs we face, and will help us meet the rapid growth in our aging population. With your support, we can be the resource our aging Missourians need. Keep in mind, this is an educated and active voter group, who will appreciate your support.

***Please help us meet the critical needs of our aging friends and neighbors and urge the legislature and Governor to fully fund the SGDPF.***

* *Supporting this bill is a fiscally conservative move.*
* Supporting AAAs saves the state money by providing more cost-effective service management.
* The structure for collection is already in place. No new government agencies.
* AAAs are ready to assist seniors as they age in place, in the place they call home, for as long as they wish.
* Area Agencies on Aging and their senior centers improve the wellness of seniors.
* AAAs have built the foundation to strengthen senior independence.

Source: AgingIS

Source: AgingIS

Source: https://agid.acl.gov/StateProfiles/Profile/Pre/?id=27&topic=1&years=2019

**Impact of Funding Stagnation on AAAs**

* Number of senior centers has declined from 246 in 2012 to 204, with even more in jeopardy of closing. **Fewer seniors are receiving nutritious meals!**
* Services traditionally provided by volunteers has been shifted to staff.
* Center staffing has been decimated. As compared to the end of 2018, some AAAs have experienced a 40% increase in wages, while also having a 10% reduction in workforce. **Our workforce is diminished**.
* Joplin AAA eliminated 12% of their workforce positions and is not replacing vacant positions. **Jobs are being lost in our communities!**
* **AAAs across the state have eliminated other services to be able to prioritize meals.**

*“If I know a senior is hungry, I can’t sleep at night,”* AAA Director.

* After ARPA and COVID relief dollars are expended, AAAs will not be able to maintain current home-delivered meals enrollments. **Our aging neighbors will go hungry!**
* Philanthropic contributions have dropped, and most fundraising activities ceased or severely hampered – **Resources for critical services ae further reduced.**
* Static funding has resulted in reduced access for seniors for AAA services in our planning and service area. **Aging neighbors are underserved!**
* Wage increases, or lack thereof among in-home service providers, is increasing pressure on the already emergent and critical shortage of frontline care vocation workforce. **Seniors are waiting for extensive periods for in-home services. Many can’t wait which results in the transition to institutional care.**
* **The need is far greater than our capacity to respond.**

**A typical profile of a client served:**

* Woman in early 80s
* Low-income
* Lives alone
* Substantial functional limitations (needing assistance with personal hygiene, bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring, shopping and preparing meals, house cleaning, and transportation, doing laundry, self-administering medication and handling personal business)
* Four or more chronic conditions (arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis and visual impairments.).

*This is the profile of an individual who can remain independent for years with some support from their local AAA.*

**WOULD YOU RATHER FUND**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * $42,000 for ONE senior to stay one year in a skilled Medicaid facility | * $12,000 for AAA services to keep one senior safely at home |
| * Medical bills after a senior falls | * AAA fall prevention training for seniors |
| * Hospital care for a senior who has been suffering from malnourishment and anxiety | * Welcome meals delivered from a senior center by a friendly volunteer |
| * ER costs for a senior who needs a touch of reassurance | * A reassurance call from a volunteer who reminds the senior they matter |
| * The medical decline of a senior who loses purpose and will | * A senior center where friends meet, care for one another, and find meaningful work |
| * Emergency transportation—because that’s the only option | * Reasonable transportation options provided by Area Agencies on Aging |
| * Declining health because of missed doctor appointments | * Transportation systems that get seniors to the doctor for the care they need |
| These are the choices when  Area Agencies on Aging are underfunded. | These are the choices when  Area Agencies on Aging are strong. |

**AAA BENEFITS**

AAAs are ready to assist seniors as they age in place, in the place they call home, for as long as they wish.

The AAA network is able to provide services at a fraction of the cost of Medicaid funded services.

AAAs can intervene earlier

AAAs do not require a physician’s order to access services in a high-cost medical model

AAAs provide holistic care in a person-centered way by coordinating services with other home and community-based providers when additional supports are needed.

AAA services do NOT require an individual to impoverish themselves and spend all their assets.

***AAAs are Here When No One Else Is!***

AAAs stand ready to work with you to ensure the aging network funding is sufficient to meet the needs of Missourians.

The Missouri Legislature has always made a strong commitment to supporting older adults, their families, and caregivers. Please continue to be part of the solution and make this life saving work available for all of our aging neighbors.