

AREA AGENCIES ON AGING: PENNSYLVANIA'S KEYSTONE FOR OLDER ADULTS

For more than thirty years, Pennsylvania's Aging Network has served as a focal point of services to our aging population. Fifty-two (52) **Area Agencies on Aging** serve the Commonwealth's sixty-seven (67) counties. County and non-profit Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) are responsible for information, planning, developing, monitoring, providing cost-effective care, services, and advocacy to Pennsylvania's older population. AAAs are community designers and builders of support systems that enable older people to be active and vital in their community. AAAs also serve as a gatekeeper, providing assessment and options, as alternatives to costly institutionalization.

Nationally, spending from all public and private sources for institutional and home based long term care for all ages totaled more than \$137 billion, accounting for nearly 12% of all health care expenditures.¹ In 2006, Pennsylvania's long-term care budget totaled \$3.9 billion. Above and beyond the \$298 million dollars allocated to AAA's from the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, AAAs manage nearly \$300 million in State and community dollars to support older adults, families and disabled persons as well..

AAAs provide a wide variety of non-medical, social services and support that make it possible for people to remain in their home and community by providing:

- Single point of entry into the "Aging Network" and its comprehensive service system that provides unbiased access to resources and assistance.
- Working knowledge of community resources for consumers and their families that provide proven and demonstrated community integration of care that is cost efficient and effective.
- Information and assistance to a growing public demand for information and referral services.
- Assistance to consumers and caregivers that enable older people to remain in their home with dignity and maximum independence.
- Development, support, and integration of vast reserves of volunteer resources and community dollars.

Unlike many other government services, AAAs have developed from a local, community service delivery system with providers and working relationships predating the Pennsylvania

¹ GAO Long Term Care "Aging Baby Boom Generation" 02-544T

Department of Aging. This historical perspective of the AAAs ensures the ability to focus programming and spending on the community and the consumer.

Through local Advisory Councils and a strong Senior Center Network, AAAs enable older Pennsylvanians to have their voice heard. AAAs insure a service structure without the natural inflation of bureaucratic structure and expense. AAAs minimize bureaucratic spending, while capitalizing upon a capacity to remain attuned and responsive to the varied nature of Pennsylvania's communities.

Now, more than ever, this well established coordinating body is needed. State administration must support the AAA Network, which brings to State government considerable knowledge and skill, as well as a vast connection to systems. This Network has established working relationships with public utilities, insurance companies, housing authorities, hospitals, tax collectors, health care agencies, local coroners, law enforcement, judicial systems, support and consumer groups.

AAAs provide key community relations and inter agency associations that are productive and collaborative. AAA ties to legislators, business owners, hospitals, medical and rehabilitation facilities, as well as medical, educational and social service professionals have always kept them on the pulse the community.

Touching lives every day, AAA's bring 2,843 full time and 534 part time employees with more than 20,000 years of cumulative experience together to serve as advocate and deliverer of in-home and community supportive care. Program emphasis has been increased to address the growing number of older frail and homebound individuals. However, AAA's have not lost sight of a desire to build continuums of care into the long-term care system. It is important to note that through AAA initiatives, 30000 volunteers provide over 2.6 million hours of community service. Statistical evidence demonstrates that approximately 490,000 individuals reach out each year to AAA's information and referral systems (I&R) for assistance and advice. Given the anticipated increase in demand for long-term care services resulting from the aging of the baby boom generation, focus will continue to be made upon the availability of needed supportive service systems.

It is important to recognize that long-term care services are not just another set of traditional health services. Meeting acute and chronic health care needs is an important element of caring for aging and disabled people. Reliance upon AAA staff through in-home service provision, will enable frail individuals and those eligible for nursing homes to be

cared for within their community through the collaborative efforts of the Departments of Aging and Public Welfare. These several levels of care ultimately forestall, the most expensive form of care - institutionalization.

Not ignoring the mobile and well elderly, AAAs have diligently expanded their resource base and services delivery systems to serve this growing population. Well elderly persons are being served through informational services, local senior centers, employment, education and health programs and volunteer options and opportunities. Today, 651 Senior Centers are vibrant places, active and enjoyed by over 170,000 of Pennsylvania's older voting population.

AAA's provide a multi-tiered approach of caring for a community of individuals from various backgrounds, ethnic, social and economic groups. Mindful of the limits of public spending, AAA's now partner with older people to responsibly plan for their future and reasonably "cost share" care and service expenditures.

Through the Aging Network, AAA's can make Pennsylvania ready for the longevity boom assuring user friendly information and services.

AAA's have been instrumental in increasing the capacity of people to serve others through family care giving. Older people and their family caregivers can maintain their quality of life and independence at home, remaining integrated in society.

Through the PA Department of Aging, AAA' s maximize the local use of Medical Assistance dollars to provide lower cost, enhanced in-home and community based care. This collaboration carries three benefits of enabling consumers to remain at home, generating significant cost savings to the Commonwealth; while Medical Assistance dollars supplement State funds in supplying additional in-home and community based services at the local level.

In 2005-2006, actively reaching into all 67 counties of the Commonwealth, Pennsylvania's fifty-two Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) made it possible for nearly 300,00 disabled older people to sustain a sufficient level of independence to remain safely in their home and community. For many of these people, the AAA's professional assessment of need, service planning and care management are and continue to be, all that stands between them and the devastating necessity of premature and costly institutionalization.

Providing strategic leadership, collaborative relationships, resources and development to effectively meet growing needs, AAAs occupy an essential place at a critical time as Pennsylvania's keystone for older adults.