

California Commission on Aging

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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor

Executive Director
Karol Swartzlander

February 9, 2021

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Senator
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
Senator
B03 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein and Senator Padilla,

I am writing today on behalf of the California Commission on Aging in support of the many essential California programs that are funded through the federal Older Americans Act (OAA) to provide vital services and supports that enable older adults and their caregivers to age with health and dignity in their homes. These programs have been even more important in responding to the needs of older Americans nationwide during the ongoing pandemic and economic crisis.

Along with thousands of aging organizations across the nation, we are writing to urge national policy leaders to address critical health and aging policy priorities, [which were largely left unaddressed in the COVID-19 relief and omnibus FY 2021 appropriations package](#) at the end of last year. **Specifically, additional emergency funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs is desperately needed** to ensure that older adults continue to receive vital home-delivered meals, in-home services, caregiver assistance, and other community-based supportive services to meet the drastically increasing needs of older and caregiver constituents during this crisis. California's network of home and community-based service providers made immediate shifts in program delivery in order to keep services flowing to older adults, but these adjustments were primarily possible due to increased funding from the CARES Act and other emergency supports.

Vital OAA programs meet the needs of the very people who are at the highest risk of hospitalization or death from COVID-19. Nationally, of the nearly 450,000 Americans lost to COVID-19, 80 percent were 65 or older. Sixty percent were 75 or older. Furthermore, older Americans who contract the coronavirus

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have a five to 13 times higher risk of hospitalization and a 90 to 630 times higher risk of death than adults under age 30. More than 40 percent of California's deaths from COVID-19 have been nursing home residents, who comprise less than 1 percent of the state population.

We are very concerned that failure to include funding for OAA services in another bill responding to COVID-19 will harm older Americans who have been hardest hit by this health and economic crisis. As such, we urge lawmakers to include, at a minimum, an additional \$1.364 billion provided through the Older Americans Act in the next relief package. This request echoes calls-to-action from [national aging advocacy organizations](#) in every corner of the nation. Without OAA investments, the next COVID-19 response will leave behind the older Californians who desperately need continued support and their family caregivers.

Specifically, we urge you to invest, at a minimum, \$1.364 billion for Older Americans Act programs administered by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), including:

- \$750 million for Congregate and Home-Delivered Nutrition Services (Title III C)
- \$400 million for Supportive Services (Title III B), which includes \$200 million for existing services as well as \$200 million for vaccination outreach and support to hard-to-reach older adults
- \$20 million for Native American Aging Programs (for Nutrition and Supportive Services) (Title VI)
- \$44 million for Evidence-Based Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (Title III D)
- \$150 million for Family Caregiver Support (Title III E)

Importantly, as part of this emergency funding, we urge Congress to boost federal investments in Older Americans Act III B Supportive Services to provide the wrap-around services that will greatly aide our national efforts to vaccinate older adults and family caregivers. AAAs can provide education on the importance of vaccination, can help older adults navigate the often complicated and non-age-friendly vaccine sign-up systems most of which are online and can provide the direct, supportive services that enable these older adults to keep the vaccination appointment (e.g., transportation, personal assistance, case management). These efforts essentially enhance existing and future massive vaccine deployment efforts by state and local public health agencies, but to do this, the network will require additional federal resources.

We also ask you to prioritize for vaccination the direct care staff that AAAs and other community-based organizations employ. This workforce will be essential in implementing the hands-on, non-virtual vaccination support (accompanying older adults to vaccine sites, providing transportation, etc.), but only if they themselves are vaccinated.

Collectively, we have the opportunity to turn around our nation's COVID-19 efforts and provide a unified response that meets the moment and the need. We also must ensure that California's aging service providers are able to continue serving high-risk older adults and their caregivers. Additional emergency investments in the Older Americans Act are desperately needed to ensure that we can continue to address these needs.

Without further federal legislative leadership and action to advance additional supports to vital community-based aging and health care programs, older adults and their caregivers will endure unnecessary, preventable suffering. We implore lawmakers to prioritize older Americans by including

funding for these vital aging programs in the next relief legislation. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the California Commission on Aging at ccoa@cco.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E Schmeding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and a small "ing" at the end.

Ellen Schmeding
Chair