



## STATE OF WASHINGTON WASHINGTON STATE COUNCIL ON AGING 2020 Legislative Priorities

The Washington State Council on Aging (WSCoA), a unified voice across Washington, is a unique advocacy group in the arena of senior issues. The WSCoA is charged with advising the Governor, the DSHS Secretary and the State Unit on Aging (RCW 43.20A.695), offering an inside and statewide perspective on matters concerning seniors and people with disabilities.

*As we plan for the beginning of the third decade of this century, the aging demographic continues its rapid growth. Modest investment today can preserve programs that have immense value. This decade will be critical to the future of our state – a future where older people live more productive lives with a modest amount of help. WSCoA*

During the 2020 Legislative Session the WSCoA will emphasize the following priority issues:

**Issue** – Support funding for the work done by the largely volunteer-based and highly effective *Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program*, including supporting efforts to extend the reach of this program to more facilities and seniors in need.

**Issue** – The challenge of caring for those served by supported assistance programs commands our attention. Care acuity levels are increasing, which influences case complexity. The WSCoA supports the efforts of *W4A* to reduce caseloads by employing more case managers.

**Issues** – A number of housing issues command our attention:

- There continues a need for low-cost housing options focused on Older Adults: a growing percentage of the homeless population is made up of seniors. We recommend added emphasis on the demographics related to seniors who are homeless in our state.
- Residential Nursing Home facilities need adequate rates to be able to afford to provide services to those whose need is critical.

**Issue** – Support the work of the *Dementia Action Collaborative (DAC)* and continue the rollout of the Washington State Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias.

### **Expansion of issues**

- **Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program** – The *Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program* is a key element in prevention of harm to vulnerable adults. The accumulated benefit of this largely volunteer-staffed program is great. The WSCoA supports providing the program with additional \$300,000 GF-S maintenance funding (\$150k 2019; \$150k 2020) which was inadvertently eliminated in the last biennial budget. Additionally, we believe that the Ombudsman program should be expanded – too few eligible homes serving seniors have access to such a trained problem-solver. We support efforts to study the impact and costs associated with expanding coverage of this program.
- **Case Management** – Case Managers provide oversight and hands-on assistance to more than 3,700 people living at home with **both** serious mental illness and physical disabilities. Case management in such instances is highly complex and time consuming. WSCoA supports the advocacy of W4A to hire additional case managers to support these clients' complex and unique needs. (3.4 million GF-S with matching federal funds)
- **Residential Care Facility Rate Structure** – Residential Care facility rates must be set such that organizations can afford to undertake this critical business function. Recently a number of needed senior living communities have closed, in some cases directly related to the funding received for the work and care provided. WSCoA supports the efforts by ALTSA to revise the rate setting process to provide more up-to-date rate valuation.
- **Dementia Action Collaborative funding requests** – The DAC is continuing the request (initiated in the 2019 budget ask) for funding of Dementia Resource Catalysts in four areas in the state. These professionals would work along-side AAA's to fill gaps in supportive services for people with dementia (\$1.9+mm, 2020 GF-S).

### **Ongoing issues -**

- **Support ALTSA request legislation and funding needs** – Inherent in the work of the WSCoA is remaining attuned to, and supporting the important work of ALTSA. As additional requests are formulated, the WSCoA will review and consider support.
- **Continue the work of the JLEC** - The WSCoA has a strong interest in continuing the work of the *Joint Legislative Executive Committee on Planning For Aging and Disability Issues*. The issues this state will face in the future, as the Age Wave continues to grow, require a dedicated group of thought leaders paying close attention to the critical matters of the day.