



**STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE COUNCIL ON AGING
2023 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 the plan for the third decade of this century unfolds, 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.

During the 2023 Legislative Session the WScOA will emphasize the following priority issues:

Issue—Maintain Caseload Ratios for case managers and provide necessary funding to allow this to happen, including training of new workers.

Last session you funded Caseload ratios at 75:1 for State and AAA case management. We want to keep the funding for that ratio going forward. Employees and volunteers have become increasingly difficult to retain, hire and find due both to the long-term stresses they have endured during the Pandemic and the ready availability of job openings across our economy which pay better. We ask you to take all measures necessary to ensure that the Senior Services Sector has an adequate workforce.

Issue—Housing issues need addressed for Seniors. Rent/cost/availability and support of low-cost housing options focused on Older Adults are a must. - A growing percentage of the homeless population is made up of seniors. WScOA recommends added emphasis on the demographics related to seniors who are homeless in our state.

Issue—Senior Center financial support:

Senior centers have been a great gathering point for seniors pre and post pandemic. The centers provide many services, including acting as cooling centers during hot weather, as vaccination locations and as a resource to aid Seniors especially through food distribution and socialization support. We ask the legislature to do a statewide study of what senior centers are, what they do and where they need support.

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.
- ***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*. We understand the JLEC would like to examine its mission and purpose in 2023 and we believe such a discussion is a good way to ensure the issues critical to seniors remain a focus of the JLEC. As the Age Wave continues to grow the issues this state faces and will continue to face in the future require a dedicated group of thought-leaders paying close attention to the critical matters of the day.
- ***Support the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program*** - Funding is inadequate for this largely volunteer-based and highly effective program. WSCoA supports efforts to extend the reach of this program to more facilities and seniors in need.
- ***Support the work of the Dementia Action Collaborative (DAC)*** - Continue the rollout of the Washington State Plan to Address Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementias.
- **Issue – WSCoA encourages the legislature and leadership of the State to continue critical work toward preventing and mitigating the negative aspects of social isolation on Seniors.**

The impact of Social Isolation on the population of older adults needs continued attention post pandemic. A great deal has been learned about how to operate supporting systems during a pandemic, but the crisis of Social Isolation is continuing as some older adults remain isolated due to concerns about contracting the virus. The previous norm of having easy in-person access to such activities as medical services, educational facilities, and social/family relationships, to name a few, were altered. Today we must assist seniors in transitioning back to in person activities and access while ensuring they have online assistance when needed. Technology alone does make a difference, but **adequate and reliable Broadband Internet** available to all citizens throughout our state must be assured.