



STATE OF WASHINGTON WASHINGTON STATE COUNCIL ON AGING 2024 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 2024 Legislative Session the WScOA will emphasize the following priority issues:

Issue—Support W4A request for funds to reduce caseloads to 55:1 for case managers of clients without caregivers in the home. By SFY25 AAAs will support over 4,500 clients who do not have a paid in-home caregiver. With insufficient paid caregivers in the workforce, clients may wait for months before getting care. AAA case managers need the capacity to visit more often and spend more time with clients who do not have in-home assistance.

Issue—Seniors Face a “Perfect Storm” of Hunger. Area Agency on Aging nutrition programs provide hot meals at community sites, senior center food pantries, mobile food pantries, and support Home Delivered Meals (Meals on Wheels) programs, and other nutrition services. They face the loss of 39% of nutrition funding, at a time when all nutrition related costs are increasing. Significant additional funding is needed to prevent increasing food insecurity/hunger and the subsequent further erosion of older adult health in our state.

Issue—Senior Center support. Senior centers continue to be a great gathering point for older adults. Centers provide many services, including acting as environmental (heating and cooling) facilities during inclement weather; as vaccination locations; and as a resource to aid Seniors through food distribution and socialization support. The State of Washington has little information about the formal (and informal) networks of Centers in the state. We continue to ask the legislature to do a statewide comprehensive study of senior centers, 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*. 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 work of the Dementia Action Collaborative (DAC)*** – And support the rollout of the renewed Washington State Plan to Address Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementias.
- ***WSCoA encourages the legislature and leadership of the State to continue critical work toward mitigating and preventing the negative aspects of social isolation on Older Adults in our state*** - The crisis of Social Isolation is continuing as a number of older adults remain isolated. 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, has been altered. More and more we need to provide assistance in assuring capacity is available to utilize growing remote and technology assisted services. Adequate and reliable Broadband Internet available to all citizens throughout our state must be assured. In support of these efforts, the WSCoA supports the *Internet for All in Washington* plan, and *Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)* program.