

The Economic Crisis and Its Impact on State Aging Programs – Follow-Up

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Results of All-State Survey



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INTRODUCTION

On December 8, 2008, the National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA) released the results of a survey of its membership, conducted to gauge the impact of the economic downturn on aging services in the United States. The results revealed an across the board increase in the demand for services for older adults and individuals with disabilities in the face of 70 percent of the states anticipating severe budget cuts. These results mirror the conclusions of similar surveys by the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Directors. In an effort to glean additional information as well as specific recommendations for infrastructure projects that could be included in an economic stimulus package, NASUA once again surveyed its membership. Nineteen states provided responses to the follow-up survey.

Difficult Choices for States

Nearly 40 percent of the states responding to the survey report that they are either currently having difficulty meeting state match requirements for Older Americans Programs or are not having that problem only because they are cutting programs that receive only state funding. Some states have home and community based programs that include things like case management and attendant care that receive only state funding. Shifting these funds from these state funded only programs to OAA programs will allow some states to meet their match requirements. Fifteen percent of states are already anticipating difficulty meeting match requirements for FY2010.

The Elderly Nutrition Program is one of the most important programs funded by the Older Americans Act. Adequate nutrition is critical for health and quality of life. Home-delivered and congregate meals funded through the Elderly Nutrition Program are one of the vital supports that allow seniors to stay in their homes, delaying or avoiding institutionalization. Unfortunately, the economic downturn is likely to have a negative

impact on the continued viability of these programs. One third of the states responding reported that they may reduce or limit both congregate and home delivered meals in order to balance their budgets.

Candidates for Stimulus

NASUA previously reported that one of the program strategies states are using to realize savings is not implementing programs that are authorized by the state, but have not yet been started. These types of projects are “ready to go” and are appropriate for federal assistance as part of the economic stimulus package. A number of states reported that they are suspending expansions of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) because of the economic downturn. In forty-seven states, the ADRC model already exists. Funding for those states that are unable to fully fund ADRCs would be a benefit to the state and to the federal budget. ADRCs are a proven model for providing information and options counseling about long term care. Informed consumers who are able to access the most appropriate and cost efficient services in the community can delay or avoid more costly care in institutions. Other ideas from the states include:

Senior Centers – Funding for new construction as well as remodeling of older centers to make them accessible was mentioned by several states. Multipurpose Senior Centers are an important delivery mechanism for services to older adults, including health promotional activities, congregate meals, as well as being a source of critical social support for older adults successfully aging in their communities.

Information technology – Funding for client information systems; laptops for social workers who can then enroll individuals in programs they are eligible for from their homes; upgrade of state website capable of uploading resource databases from ADRCs in order to enable families to get information about available services.

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program – These grants are administered by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service and enable eligible low income older adults to exchange coupons for eligible foods at farmers’ markets. One state reported that it has the infrastructure in place, but needs funding for statewide expansion that would benefit low income seniors as well as farmers.

Transportation – In some states, vehicles are needed for transporting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and for the delivery of meals. Another state mentioned additional funding for United We Ride transportation coordinators and operating expenses.

Nutrition programs -- Kitchen upgrades are needed to improve energy efficiency and quality of meals for congregate and home delivered meals.

Area Agency on Aging (AAA) – A number of states reported the need for funding for AAAs for infrastructure projects. One example: Funding for completing renovation of building for use as a commercial kitchen and adult care facility that would triple the capacity for meals on wheels, senior center meals and adult day care.

Long term care rebalancing support – One state reported suspending a project that requires a vendor to develop individualized budgets and a new reimbursement methodology for community based services. Delays in long term care rebalancing projects undermine efforts to transform the existing system into one more responsive to individual needs and more cost effective for state and federal government.

Workforce – Funding for training of unemployed to become caregivers; tax incentives for volunteers.

Low-income senior housing projects

Family Caregiver Support -- Including housing, Alzheimer's Day Care Resource Center, education.

Adult Day Care – Funding to repair infrastructure for existing buildings.

Disaster Preparedness Planning Support – Including software that permits real time update to hand-held devices for first responders.

Funding for expansion of evidence based health promotion and chronic disease management programs.

Conclusion

The economic downturn continues to find states facing reduced revenues and difficult choices about what programs to cut in order to stay within their budgets. The many programs administered by the State Units on Aging, including those funded by the Older Americans Act, provide a vital lifeline to the most vulnerable populations – older adults and the disabled of all ages. It is imperative that the states receive some temporary fiscal relief to ensure that the progress that has been made in supporting individuals in their communities is not lost.

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