



SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

(RECOMMENDATIONS)

2019 – 2020

Mission: The Snohomish County Council on Aging (COA) is a citizens' advisory group charged with advising Snohomish County Long Term Care and Aging (LTCA), the Human Services Department, the County Council and the County Executive on matters of policy and implementation of the Snohomish County Area Plan on Aging to ensure maximum independence and dignity for older residents (age 60 and older) and individuals with disabilities receiving services administered by the Aging and Disability Services Division.

The COA's major legislative priorities for 2019-2020 are:

I. PRESERVE WASHINGTON STATE'S LONG TERM CARE SYSTEM AND SENIOR INDEPENDENCE

- A. Provide home and community-based options that help older adults and adults with disabilities remain as independent as possible in the community. In Snohomish County, the senior population, age 60 and over, comprises greater than 18% of the population.
- B. Fully fund the Senior Citizens Services Act (SCSA) to meet the needs of an expanding population.
- C. Retain Medicaid as an entitlement program which allows for enrollment increases during economic downturns and do not convert to block grants—more than 15% of Snohomish County residents over the age of 65 are living at or slightly above the federal poverty level.
- D. Support unpaid caregivers.

II. RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF A GROWING OLDER POPULATION

Support the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) an additional three years (2020-2023) with funding to meet the needs of the expanding 60+ population. OAA funding provides services that keep seniors healthy, independent and active in their own homes and communities.

- A. Maximize the transportation resources available to older adults and people with disabilities through greater collaboration among transit, planning agencies, the Aging Network, and disability organizations.
- B. Expand options for safe, accessible, and affordable housing for older adults and people with disabilities.
- C. Support the Alzheimer's State Plan and the development of Dementia Friendly communities. Alzheimer's disease or other dementia is the third leading cause of death in Snohomish County. One in three people over the age of 85 have an Alzheimer's disease or dementia diagnosis.
- D. Maximize access to affordable food and nutrition counseling.

III. EMPOWER AND PROTECT OLDER ADULTS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

- A. Protect vulnerable older adults from all forms of elder abuse.
- B. Preserve the Long Term Care Ombudsman program's ability to advocate on behalf of older adults and people with disabilities who live in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and adult family homes.
- C. Promote access to and increase funding of affordable legal services.
- D. Provide geriatric mental health services that meet the unique needs of seniors.

IV. PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF OLDER ADULTS

- A. Preserve Social Security.
- B. Adopt the Elder Economic Security Index.
- C. Maintain Medicare benefits.
- D. Increase access to literacy programs.
- E. Encourage people of all ages to save for retirement.

I. PRESERVE WASHINGTON STATE’S LONG TERM CARE SYSTEM AND SENIOR INDEPENDENCE

- Almost 90% of people over age 65 wish to age-in-place by staying in their home for as long as possible. ¹
- More than three-quarters of individuals aged 80+ live in their own home.²
- Washington State began reducing its dependence on nursing homes in the early 1990s and creating a system of home and community-based services for low-income seniors and younger adults with disabilities.
- Caring for people at home costs about one-third of the cost of nursing home care.
- Since 1995, area agency on aging case management has saved Washington State over **3.5 billion dollars** in Medicaid spending by promoting home and community-based care as the participant-preferred and cost-effective service alternative to institutional care.
- Currently, there are approximately 3,800 Snohomish County low-income seniors and adults with disabilities receiving in-home care and case management services. By 2028, Medicaid-funded long term care services for seniors and adults with disabilities are expected to grow to 90,000 in the State (expanding the need for services and supports by 150% across the state).³

A. PROVIDE COMMUNITY-BASED OPTIONS THAT HELP OLDER ADULTS REMAIN AS INDEPENDENT AS POSSIBLE IN THE COMMUNITY. IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY, THE SENIOR POPULATION, AGE 60 AND OVER, COMPRISES GREATER THAN 18% OF THE POPULATION

- Encourage seniors to remain independent and assist them in utilizing their talents, skills, and experiences to remain in their homes; thus avoiding nursing facility placement.
- Preserve mobile home communities. 4.7% of housing in Snohomish County are mobile homes.⁴

B. FULLY FUND THE SENIOR CITIZENS SERVICES ACT (SCSA) AT A LEVEL THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF AN EXPANDING POPULATION.

- In 1977 the Washington State Legislature passed the Senior Citizens Services Act (SCSA) to establish community-based services that help seniors stay home for their long term care. Currently funded at \$8.4 million dollars per year, SCSA

helps over 323,000 older adults annually by funding transportation, personal care services, home-delivered meals and other vital services.

- Although the 60+ population continues to grow, the per capita amount of SCSA funds has steadily decreased service provision since 1998 because the funding has remained static.

C. RETAIN MEDICAID AS AN ENTITLEMENT PROGRAM WHICH ALLOWS FOR ENROLLMENT INCREASES DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS AND DO NOT CONVERT TO BLOCK GRANTS—MORE THAN 15% OF SNOHOMISH COUNTY RESIDENTS OVER THE AGE OF 65 ARE LIVING AT OR SLIGHTLY ABOVE THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL.

- Continue to means-test program applicants.
- People with Medicaid must be able to plan on a sustainable level of benefit.
- Provide for access to comprehensive health care including primary, specialty, and acute care, prescription drugs, mental health, substance abuse, and prenatal care.

D. SUPPORT UNPAID CAREGIVERS.

- Increase support to unpaid caregivers enabling them to provide quality and sustained levels of care for seniors. In 2017, the Washington State Governor’s Office reported that 80% of the State’s long term care is provided by 820,000 caregivers who are unpaid.⁵
- Enable Area Agencies on Aging to provide a full complement of services for our seniors and their unpaid caregivers.
- Support unpaid caregivers to reduce the mental, physical and emotional stress and exhaustion from their efforts to keep seniors in their homes rather than placed in state-funded facilities. These efforts reduce state costs greatly.
- Support includes, but is not limited to, the development of dementia friendly communities.

II. RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF A GROWING OLDER POPULATION

Every day almost 10,000 Baby Boomers turn 65. By 2030, Washington State’s elderly population is forecast to reach 1,675,800 persons or one-fifth of the state’s total population. By 2025, almost 25% of Snohomish County’s population will be age 60+ or nearly a quarter of a million people.⁶ 2016 estimates indicate that 12.1% of Snohomish

County residents were age 65 and over, and of those, 4.3% were age 65-69, 2.9% were age 70-74, and 1.5% were age 85 and over.⁷

A. SUPPORT THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) AN ADDITIONAL THREE YEARS (2020-2023) WITH FUNDING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE EXPANDING 60+ POPULATION. OAA FUNDING PROVIDES SERVICES THAT KEEP SENIORS HEALTHY, INDEPENDENT AND ACTIVE IN THEIR OWN HOME AND COMMUNITIES.

- The Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965 created a network of federal, state, and local agencies and organizations that provide services to older persons living in their homes and communities. Local Area Agencies on Aging like Snohomish County Long Term Care & Aging (LTCA) serve a defined geographic area and work with a citizens' advisory board such as the Snohomish County Council on Aging to plan and contract with providers in order to create a local system of services for older adults.
- The OAA provides older adults with much-needed services that include congregate and home-delivered meals, case management, legal services, transportation and support for unpaid caregivers. For years, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population of individuals eligible for services, yet demand by at-risk older adults in need of supportive services has risen and will continue to rise with the growth of the aging population.

B. MAXIMIZE THE TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO OLDER ADULTS, AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH GREATER COLLABORATION AMONG TRANSIT, PLANNING AGENCIES, THE AGING NETWORK, AND DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS.

- The average older man will outlive his ability to drive a car by 6 years while the average older woman will outlive her ability to drive by 11 years.⁸
- 11.9% of Snohomish County residents who were 60 years or older drove to work, while 10.5% used public transportation.⁹
- A 2009 study found that 24% of households aged 80+ did not have a vehicle, compared to 9% among those aged 65-79.¹⁰

- Lack of transportation options contributes to more than 50% of non-drivers over age 65 not leaving their homes most days.¹¹
- Advocate for paratransit services that are easily utilized, comprehensive, reliable, and with a simplified application process for people who may be eligible for the program. Currently, passengers living only within three-quarters of a mile of a fixed transit route are served under public paratransit, mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).¹²
- Work to restore Sunday and holiday service and to reinstate canceled bus routes that affect riders of all ages.
- Provide travel training to older adults and people with disabilities who want to learn how to use the public transportation system.

C. EXPAND OPTIONS FOR SAFE, ACCESSIBLE, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

- Develop housing options for older adults who cannot get beds in the county's overcrowded shelters.
- Improve community-based living options such as adult family homes.
- Protect and preserve existing subsidized senior housing.
- Adopt policies and create incentives to encourage sustainable, universal design features in new construction and remodeling projects.

D. SUPPORT THE ALZHEIMER'S STATE PLAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES. ALZHEIMERS DISEASE OR OTHER-DEMENTIAS ARE THE THIRD LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY

- From 2013-2015, 5% of deaths in Snohomish County were related to Alzheimer's disease.¹³
- During 2016, 6.3% of deaths in Washington were caused by Alzheimer's.¹⁴
- The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services estimates that 270,000 State residents aged 65+ will have Alzheimer's Dementia in 2040.¹⁵

E. MAXIMIZE ACCESSIBILITY TO AFFORDABLE FOOD AND NUTRITION.

- Older adults may experience nutrition risks or malnutrition as their bodies change with age.
- Physiological processes slow, appetites may decrease and physical problems can arise. In addition, older adults' chronic conditions and use of multiple medications may increase, which may affect nutrition status.

- Psychosocial risk factors for malnutrition include cognitive impairment, depression, isolation and difficulty accessing food. People can become malnourished whether they are underweight, overweight, or obese and experience the resulting adverse effects on their health, function and well-being. Access to nutrition programming improves health outcomes for older adults.
- Snohomish County, under OAA funding, served nearly 16,000 home delivered meals monthly in 2017 and is adding approximately 50 new older adults monthly to this program in 2018 —without additional funding, there is potential for a wait list.
- Snohomish County, under OAA funding, served approximately 6000 congregate meals monthly in 2017 and is adding approximately 100 new older adults monthly to this program in 2018—without additional funding, there is potential for wait list.

III. EMPOWER AND PROTECT OLDER ADULTS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Many older people continue to play important roles in their communities as employees, volunteers, elected and appointed officials, citizens, and family members. Older adults who are socially isolated and not connected to their communities are particularly vulnerable. Programs that empower and connect older adults to services, other people and their communities are vital.

A. PROTECT VULNERABLE OLDER ADULTS FROM ALL FORMS OF ELDER ABUSE.

- Fund Adult Protective Services, Long Term Care Ombudsman, and other programs that protect older individuals from harm, whether physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment, financial exploitation or self-neglect.
- Older individuals face a higher risk of becoming a victim of elder abuse if they have dementia; are socially isolated; are in poor physical health; or if the perpetrator and/or the victim has mental health or substance abuse issues.
- The Joint Center for Housing Studies projected that people living alone aged 75+ will double from 6.9 million in 2015 to 13.4 million in 2035.¹⁶
- Currently, it is estimated that 39.6% of Snohomish County residents aged 60+ are living alone.¹⁷

B. PRESERVE THE LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM’S ABILITY TO ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF OLDER ADULTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO LIVE IN NURSING HOMES, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES, AND ADULT FAMILY HOMES. LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROVIDE ADVOCACY FOR QUALITY OF

LIFE FOR RESIDENTS OF NURSING HOMES, BOARD AND CARE HOMES, AND ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES

- Long Term Care Ombudsman services are a vital component of long term care services who resolve problems for residents of nursing facilities and residential care facilities.
- Long Term Care Ombudsman program requires additional funding in Snohomish County to continue to provide this vital service.

C. PROMOTE ACCESS TO AND INCREASE FUNDING TO AFFORDABLE LEGAL SERVICES.

- The Older Americans Act provided funding for legal assistance to approximately 100 low income older adults in Snohomish County per month in 2017. The need for assistance is greater than the amount served and a wait list was instituted in 2017.
- Legal services provided under the Older Americans Act combats injustice in all its forms to older adults and individuals with disabilities.
- Funding is needed to meet the needs of low income older adults and individuals with disabilities to address legal needs and combat injustice and to avoid wait list in the upcoming biennium.

D. PROVIDE GERIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THAT MEET THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF SENIORS.

- An estimated 20% of people age 55 years or older experience some type of mental health concern with the most common being anxiety, severe cognitive impairment and mood disorders such as depression or bipolar disorder.¹⁸
- By 2050, the prevalence of depressive disorders in older adults is expected to more than double.¹⁹
- Guarantee reasonable access to mental health services to all seniors.
- Expand successful Snohomish County programs already serving seniors such as Geriatric Depression Screening, Senior Peer Support, and Hope Options.
- Early identification and treatment of mental health problems helps individuals maintain independence and avoid severe illnesses which require expensive institutionalized care.

IV. PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF OLDER ADULTS

Over 4.2 million or 8.8% of Americans aged 65+ lived below the poverty level in 2015. However, this overall number conceals that older minorities experience higher rates of poverty than whites and that a higher rate of older women compared to older men live in poverty. Approximately 6.6% of elderly whites were poor while 18.4% of elderly African-Americans, 11.8% of older Asians, and 17.5% of elderly Hispanics lived in poverty. In 2015, 10.3% of older women lived in poverty compared to 7% of older men.²⁰

The 2016 American Community Survey reported that 7.5% of Snohomish County residents aged 65+ were living below 100 % of the poverty line and 7.8% were living between 100 to 149% of the poverty line.²¹

An older adult may live above the federal poverty level but still experience economic insecurity. An estimated 25 million Americans aged 60+ are considered to be economically insecure, living at or below 250% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$29,425 per year for a single person).²² These older Americans struggle to meet daily expenses and live modestly but can easily be pushed into poverty by high medical costs, the loss of a spouse or the need to raise a grandchild. 23.3% of Snohomish County residents aged 65+ are widowed. 0.9% of Snohomish County residents aged 65+ are responsible for grandchildren under 18 years, compared to the State's overall kinship care average of 3%.^{23 24}

A. PRESERVE SOCIAL SECURITY.

- More than half of Washington residents age 65 and older rely on Social Security for 50% or more of their income. For 25% of older Washingtonian residents, Social Security is their only source of income.²⁵
- Ensure Social Security's long term solvency. The American Community Survey estimates that 71.6% of Snohomish County residents aged 60+ receive Social Security income.²⁶ In 2017, the Social Security Administration reported that 3,555 Snohomish County residents aged 65+ received Social Security.²⁷
- Guarantee inflation protection and progressive benefits.
- "Do No Harm" to the vulnerable groups that rely on Social Security.
- Oppose privatization and the establishment of private accounts.
- Educate and encourage seniors to plan and save for retirement with Social Security, private savings, pensions and investments.

B. ADOPT THE ELDER ECONOMIC SECURITY INDEX.

- This index identifies the basic costs of living by state and by county rather than a survival existence for seniors. Living expenses differ depending on whether the older adult is single or part of a couple, a renter or home owner, and healthy or in poor health.
- In Snohomish County, an older adult (age 65+) who rents a one bedroom apartment would need \$2,176 per month or \$26,112 per year to cover basic living expenses while an older couple (both age 65+) still paying a mortgage would need \$3,652 per month or \$43,824 per year to live modestly.²⁸
- Target older adults on the basis of greatest economic need, but educate all older adults and people planning for retirement about the need for economic security.

C. MAINTAIN MEDICARE BENEFITS.

- Ensure the long term financial stability of the Medicare program.
- Standardize benefits and cost-sharing across Medicare Advantage plans and Part D prescription drug plans to reduce confusion and make it easier for people with Medicare to understand costs and benefits.
- Continue efforts to revise Medicare reimbursement policy including reductions in geographical inequities.

D. INCREASE ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS THAT ENCOURAGE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO PLAN AND SAVE FOR RETIREMENT.

- Promote educational programming to encourage all Snohomish County residents to plan for retirement.

¹ AARP Public Policy Institute and National Conference of State Legislatures, *In Brief 190: Aging In Place*, December 2011. Retrieved from <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/ib190.pdf>

² Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2014). *Housing America's Older Adults*. Retrieved from <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/documents-2014/Harvard-Housing-Americas-Older-Adults-2014.pdf>

³ Washington State Governor's Office (2017, July 20). *Washington a model for seniors' long-term care*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/wagovernor/washington-a-model-for-seniors-long-term-health-care-fbcaa0311431>

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_DP04&prodType=table

⁵ Washington State Governor's Office (2017, July 20). *Washington a model for seniors' long-term care*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/wagovernor/washington-a-model-for-seniors-long-term-health-care-fbcaa0311431>

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For more information on the Snohomish County Council on Aging or the 2017-2018 Legislative Agenda, please contact:

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