

OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) PROGRAMS

Congress passed the Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965 in response to concern over a lack of community social services for older adults. (42 USC 3001 et seq.) The original legislation called for the creation of State Units on Aging and established the Administration on Aging (AoA), a federal entity responsible for administering the newly created grant programs and serving as the federal focal point on matters concerning older persons.¹ The Act Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020 reauthorizes programs for FY 2020 through FY 2024.² In 2012, the Administration for Community Living became the agency responsible for policy and administrative decisions of OAA, and now oversees the AoA.

The OAA is divided into seven titles.

Title I is a declaration of the OAA's ten objectives that keeps with the tradition of ensuring inherent dignity of the older individuals in society. Some of these objectives include an adequate income in retirement, the best possible physical and mental health, and obtaining and maintaining suitable housing that fits the person's needs.

Title II establishes the AoA to carry out the provisions of the Act. Title II also establishes Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which operate within a planning and service area (PSA) designated by the state unit on aging (SUA). The California Department of Aging is the SUA for the State of California. AAAs serve as local entities who, either directly or through contract with local service providers (LSPs), oversee a comprehensive and coordinated service system for the delivery of social, nutrition, and long-term services and supports to older individuals.

Title III establishes various programs, and funding for those programs, to support older individuals. In order to receive Title III funding, States must satisfy three general criteria. First, the state must have an established SUA. Second, the state must have an ACL-approved State Plan, a document filed in four-year intervals that outlines how the SUA will deliver services in compliance with and furtherance of the OAA. Third, the SUA must establish a system of Planning Service Areas which receive and utilize the federally awarded funds for program purposes.

Title III establishes multiple programs to further the OAA's objectives, the largest of which is the nutrition program. The OAA's nutrition program is comprised of two components: Title IIIC-1, which provides congregate meal services, and Title IIIC-2, which provides home-delivered meals. Additional Title III programs include:

- Supportive Services Program, including Information and Assistance (Title III B)
- Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, Legal Assistance (Title III B)

¹ <https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act>.

² <https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act>.

- Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Program (Title III D)
- Family Caregiver Support Programs (serving children & older adults) (Title III E)

Title IV was added in 1978 to establish additional programs and funding to better understand and meet older adults' needs. These include the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) program and the Resource Centers on Native American Elders. The SMP program empowers and assists Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers to prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse. California's SMP program is administered by California Health Advocates, a non-profit agency. While the Resource Centers on Native American Elders provide research, training, and technical assistance to organizations that serve Native American older adults. Areas of emphasis and training include health, long-term services and supports, elder abuse, mental health, and other issues relevant to older Native American communities.

Title V provides grants to local community agencies for multi-purpose senior centers and establishes the Community Service Employment grant program. Together, these help facilitate community service employment and volunteerism opportunities for older adults. The US Department of Labor administers the Community Service Employment grant program, making it the only OAA program not administered within the Department of Health and Human Services.

Title VI authorizes funds that are awarded to Native American tribal organizations, Native Alaskan organizations, and Native Hawaiian represented nonprofits to provide transportation, home-delivered and congregate nutrition services, service information and referrals, and other home care and caregiver supports. Unlike Title IV, which funds research and technical support to entities that serve Native American communities, Title VI funds provide direct services to Native American and their representative organizations.

Title VII provides state grants for "vulnerable elder rights protection" programs.³ These include the long-term care ombudsman program and programs dedicated to the prevention of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Title VII also provides funding for elder rights and legal assistance development. Title VII strongly emphasizes coordination among these programs to support the state ombudsman's role as an advocate and agent for systemwide change.

³ This summarizes the current version of Title VII, as authorized in 1992. The first iteration of Title VII provided congregate nutrition services, which were later moved to Title III.