

**U.S. Administration on Aging Reauthorization Listening Forum
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Reinforce and Broaden the Capacity of the Aging Network

Good afternoon, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on a critical issue that deserves attention during the upcoming reauthorization of the Older Americans Act: How do we prepare the Aging Network to meet the coming challenges of a rapidly aging nation?

The current crisis in the health care workforce, coupled with the aging of America, has alarmed policymakers and practitioners for years. The need for capacity building and workforce development in the Aging Network has received less attention, but is no less critical.

The Aging Network is anticipated to lose one-third of its local leaders as result of retirement, attrition and other factors. Many of these leaders have been involved in the Aging Network for years and with their departure a wealth of institutional knowledge and experience will be lost unless we take adequate steps to train and recruit the next generation of aging professionals and leaders. Given the increased demographic demands on aging services in the next decade, it is critical that a pool of highly trained, effective leaders remain available to continue the work of AAAs and Title VI agencies.

Aging Network programs that serve older adults and persons with disabilities are in need of additional staff and training in order to meet increasing service demands. A recent survey on AAA workforce issues conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) and the Scripps Gerontology Center found that the most common workforce challenge identified by AAAs is building capacity for future service needs with limited current funds (66.8%).

Meanwhile more than one-third of AAAs are planning for future workforce needs including making plans for new types of positions. Among the AAAs that responded they are tracking the proportion of staff within five years of retirement (32%), about one in five staff members are within five years of retirement. Clearly, we must invest in training and development of our existing AAA workforce as well as recruiting new professionals to work in the AAA and Aging Network workforce.

I encourage AoA to include in its recommendations to Congress new training and professional development initiatives to boost employment efforts in the field of aging

services that we as a nation have a strategic interest in growing: jobs in the provision of aging services and long-term services and supports.

Specifically, I recommend that AoA consider amending the OAA to do the following:

Create an undergraduate level internship program to encourage students interested in working in the field of aging. This program would be administered at the federal level through AoA and run by AAAs and Title VI agencies at the local level. Through the leadership of these agencies and their relationships in the community internship programs would be developed with local universities, community colleges and vocational schools.

Establish a career development program for aging professionals including directors, aspiring directors and professional staff to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. This program would focus on core competencies and building the skills and knowledge base necessary to allow mid-level aging professionals to advance to become agency and program directors.

Enhance current efforts to prepare the Aging Network to meet future needs through model capacity building programs such as the n4a Leadership Institute and the AoA-funded Business Institute. These programs were developed to train AAA and Title VI directors through peer level exchanges in effective leadership skills and management practices, organizational planning, and innovative programming and business strategies. They have been very successful in training the leaders of tomorrow, but they need to be authorized and expanded to reach more aging professionals.

We must focus on building the capacity of the national Aging Network infrastructure to meet the challenges ahead. To create the infrastructure needed to support the aging of the population requires investment in the Aging Network and long-term services and supports workforce, as well as dedicated programs to boost training, retention and career development in these fields; the need for this investment has been well documented.¹

The AoA and Congress have a tremendous opportunity in the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act to attend to this national priority.

¹ Institute of Medicine, "Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce," April 14, 2008.