



## Calling All Aging Advocates!!

**Contact your legislators about CO-AGE Budget and Legislative Priorities. Nothing means more to them than hearing from you, their constituents.**

On Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, the Georgia General Assembly convenes the second half of the two-year 2011-2012 legislative term. The Senior Issues Newsletter will keep you informed about what is occurring under Georgia's Gold Dome every week that the Legislature meets, bringing you current and concise information on the legislative and budgetary issues affecting older adults. If you have not yet subscribed do so now by completing the form at the end of the newsletter.

### Mark Your Calendar

- ✚ January 9<sup>th</sup>: Georgia General Assembly Convenes
- ✚ January 11<sup>th</sup>: Governor's State of the State Address & budget release
- ✚ January 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>: probable Budget Week: Joint Senate & House Budget Hearings
- ✚ January 26<sup>th</sup>, 11:00 am: **Be There 4 Seniors** Rally Day at the Capitol
- ✚ February 13<sup>th</sup>: Alzheimer's Awareness Day at the Capitol
- ✚ February 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>: Senior Week at the Capitol
- ✚ February 21<sup>st</sup> – March 8<sup>th</sup>: AARP Weeks at the Capitol

### Be There 4 Seniors Campaign

The Georgia Council on Aging is once again joining with the Georgia Association of Area Agencies on Aging, AARP and other partners throughout the state in a coordinated effort to make the financial needs of aging programs visible to state legislators. Advocacy materials are available through the Council by contacting Kathryn Fowler at [kdfowler@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:kdfowler@dhr.state.ga.us) or Abby Cox at [agcox@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:agcox@dhr.state.ga.us). The materials enable each person to understand the issues and to talk with or write their legislators. Constituents are the ones they want to hear from.



- ✚ Send e-mails and letters
- ✚ Schedule visits where you live in their home district
- ✚ Call them; and
- ✚ Talk to others and get them engaged in doing the same

A major message which **Be There 4 Seniors** wants to communicate is “No More Cuts!” and for powerful reasons. With the additional 2% cut in state funds requested by Governor Deal in August, 2011, Georgia Aging Services State Funding is now at Maintenance of Effort for Older Americans Act programs. These cuts jeopardize vital federal funding for core aging programs.

### 2012 CO-AGE Priorities

Advocates have worked diligently since July to research, draft legislation, and speak with legislators about CO-AGE issues. After designating funding for Home and Community Based Services as the perennial budgetary priority, Coalition participants selected one additional budgetary priority and two legislative priorities. Visit the Georgia Council on Aging website at [www.gcoa.org](http://www.gcoa.org) for downloadable Fact Sheets on each issue.

- **Funding for Home and Community Based Services (budget)**
- **Increase Personal Needs Allowance for Medicaid Nursing Home Residents(budget)**
- **Department of Aging (legislative)**
- **Regional Transportation Governance (legislative)**

### **Budget Priority: Funding for Home and Community Based Services**

*Community Care Services Program (CCSP)* provides the option of remaining in their homes and/or the community to older Georgians and individuals with physical disabilities who are eligible for nursing home care. CCSP Medicaid services include: Adult Day Health, Alternative Living Services, Emergency Response Services, Home Delivered Meals, Home Delivered Services, Personal Support Services, and Out-of-Home Respite Care.

SFY 2010 data shows that CCSP services delay more costly nursing home placement by an average of 49 months supporting consumer choice to remain in the community and saving Georgia over \$80,000 below nursing facility Medicaid cost.

*Non-Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)* provides supportive services to older Georgians and their caregivers and families to enable them to remain at home and manage their care, promoting health, independence and self-reliance. HCBS programs target persons 60 years of age or older who are in the greatest social and economic need. The majority of program participants are in their mid to late seventies. The program includes services such as Home Delivered Meals, Transportation, Respite Care, Adult Day Care, Homemaker Services, Personal Care Services, Senior Center Meals/Programs, Wellness Program Services and Minor Home Repairs.

For FY 2011, Georgia just met the Older Americans Act Maintenance of Effort (MOE) with the minimum required state and local funds. Georgia fell to this minimum level after Governor Perdue requested an additional 4 percent cut in state funds in August 2010, which cut Alzheimer respite services (\$225,000), Center for the Visually Impaired (\$177,859), and non-Medicaid Home and Community Based respite services (\$1.4 million). The Legislature restored this funding and made the MOE more secure.

For FY 2012, Governor Deal has requested 2% cuts in state funding which again leaves Georgia's seniors at the minimum MOE requirement. These cuts are detrimental and affect federal funding for these much needed services as well.

Advocates have met with key legislators and budget office staff for the Senate and House in recent weeks and are preparing testimony for Appropriations Committee meetings to ask for retention of funding. Local advocates should continue to speak with their legislators. Invite them to observe your services.

### **Budget Priority: Increase Personal Needs Allowance for Medicaid Nursing Home Residents**

The Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) is the amount of monthly income that a nursing home resident who receives Medicaid assistance is allowed to keep for personal use. Residents use the monthly allowance for new shoes, power wheelchair batteries and repairs, burial insurance, haircuts, clothes, glasses, hearing aids, dentures, toiletries, and other basic expenses of life.

In 1988, the Federal government increased the minimum PNA from \$25 to \$30. Although states may increase the minimum required PNA, Georgia remained at the \$30 level for 18 years until it raised the minimum to \$50 in 2006. Despite the continual increase in the cost of basic necessities, the PNA has remained \$50. As a result, many nursing home residents have difficulty paying for incidental and necessary items not covered by Medicaid. By comparison, residents of community-based personal care homes who are eligible for Medicaid-funded Community Care Services may keep at least \$95 of their monthly income for personal use, and VA residents receiving Medicaid funds for long term care are allowed to keep at least \$90 per month of their income. This disparity between Medicaid programs places nursing home residents at the bottom of the ladder for basic supplemental assistance.

In 2006 when Georgia increased the PNA to \$50, this was a 60% increase in the PNA and a substantial hit to the state budget. To avoid periodic and substantial budget increases, we are advocating for a provision that would allow a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) for the nursing home Medicaid PNA, triggered by an accepted economic indicator. Allowing a COLA would ensure that the current economy determines the timing and percentage of the increase and at the same time provide Georgia's nursing home Medicaid recipients with more funds to better meet the basic needs of daily living.

Some legislators are interested in this idea but wonder if tagging the COLA to a Georgia economic index rather than Social Security because this may not really allow an increase that would affect the seniors' spending power. Therefore, advocates are investigating other avenues for the COLA such as the Georgia Consumer Price Index.

### **Legislative Priority: Department of Aging**

We've been talking for years about when Baby Boomers would retire. It has finally happened: the Baby Boomers are here!! 2010 Census data shows that there has been a 45 percent increase in Georgians age 55 and older. There are 2.1 million adults over the age of 55 in Georgia, making up 18% of the total Georgia population. These statistics show that it is time for Georgia to invest in this vital section of Georgia's population.

The 2009 reorganization of the Department of Human Resources left the Division of Aging Services in the Department of Human Services (DHS) as the only division that does not focus on children's services. As a result, the needs and concerns of the burgeoning older adult population are often overshadowed by the divisions that serve children. This legislation would transform the Division of Aging Services into a separate Department of Aging as the hub for identifying opportunities to utilize the talents of older adults and for administering programs and services.

A key legislator is considering sponsorship of this legislation or at a minimum requesting a legislative study group to be appointed by the Governor to evaluate the need for creation of the Department. At the

same time, a fiscal note will be requested to determine the cost. The issue is being received by legislators with understanding, and local advocates should continue to inform their legislators about this need.

## **Legislative Priority: Regional Transportation Governance**

In Georgia, access to transportation is confusing, complex and sometimes non-existent. This is especially problematic for vulnerable populations such as older adults and persons with disabilities, many of whom have no other way to get around. Transportation is the most frequently requested service for older adults and persons with disabilities, as well as the most often unmet need for transit disadvantaged populations. We also know that access to transportation is a necessary link to independence for older adults and disabled individuals especially in the more rural areas of our state.

CO-AGE is supporting legislation to create locally-driven regional transit governance through the establishment of Regional Transportation Authorities (“RTAs”). RTAs can improve transportation services for all Georgians, including the transportation-disadvantaged such as seniors and persons with disabilities. Regional transit governance would effectively increase services and maximize investments in systems and services.

Kathryn Fowler and Nancy Pitra testified at the Governor’s Transit Task Force public hearing in December 2011, to let the Committee know that Co-Age is supporting the draft Regional Transportation bill that has been presented to the Governors Transit Task Force Committee by the Atlanta Regional Commission. The draft legislation goes a long way to give regions outside of metro Atlanta the flexibility they need to create RTAs comprised of local stakeholders who can best address the unique transit needs in their area. Kathryn and Nancy also presented some proposed additional language to the draft legislation to ensure that human services transportation is a key component throughout the legislation.

Legislators need and want to hear that transportation is an important issue to you, especially outside of metro Atlanta. Please make your legislators aware of the need for regional transportation governance so that transportation services will no longer stop at the county line.

### **January Board Meetings**

**Board of Community Health meets January 12, 2012**, 10:30 a.m., 5th floor, 2 Peachtree Street, Atlanta

**Board of Human Services meets January 18, 2012**, 1:00 p.m., 29th floor, 2 Peachtree Street, Atlanta

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