



WASHINGTON UPDATE

MAY 2015

Benjamin Rose Hosts WHCoA Issues Forum

The Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging hosted a day-long symposium on April 14 in anticipation of the Cleveland regional forum of the White House Conference on Aging. The symposium, held in partnership with Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (10a), Direction Home (10b) and AAA-District 11, enabled invited leaders in the fields of aging and human services to engage in an in-depth examination of the issues - elder justice, health & wellness, long-term care systems, and income security.

The insightful discussion and commentary from the Issues Forum will help us develop recommendations for national policy to send to the WHCoA, informed by our local and state experiences.

Congressional Update

Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015

On Monday, May 4, sixty-one national organizations, including the Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging, sent a letter to Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), the Senate Majority Leader, and Sen. Harry Reid, the Senate Minority Leader, urging them to move the bipartisan S.192, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, to the Senate floor for passage. The letter describes the importance of the OAA programs and their cost-effectiveness as well as the growing need for their services and the problems of reduced funding. S.192 passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee in January 2015 unanimously and currently has 18 bipartisan cosponsors.

SGR Repeal signed into Law

On April 16, President Obama signed into law a rare bipartisan agreement, ending the problem with the way that physicians were reimbursed under Medicare, the "Sustainable Growth Rate" (SGR). Without change to the SGR, Medicare reimbursements to doctors would have been cut by 21 percent starting April 1, driving doctors out of the program. The SGR had been "patched" for years but the only real solution was the permanent repeal of SGR, which began on April 14 when the Senate passed H.R. 2, the House bill, which also extended the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for two years, extended low-income provisions in the QI program to help low-income beneficiaries pay premiums, and continues outreach and enrollment programs. It is only partially paid for, and one of the "pay-fors" that Congress voted on is higher means testing for older persons with higher incomes, which was strongly opposed by many aging organizations.

White House Conference on Aging Releases Policy Briefs

The White House Conference on Aging has released policy briefs on healthy aging and on long-term services and supports, two key focus areas for the 2015 Conference. The healthy aging policy

A special thank you to our presenters and panelists:

Georgia Anetzberger, *National Center on Elder Abuse*

William Benson, *Health Benefits ABCs*

Robert Blancato, *Matz, Blancato & Associates*

Semanthie Brooks, *Benjamin Rose*

John Corlett, *Center for Community Solutions*

Robert E. Eckardt, *The Cleveland Foundation*

Stephanie Fallcreek, *Fairhill Partners*

R. Robertson Hilton, *McGregor*

Lori Lozier, *University Hospitals of Cleveland*

Cheryl Phillips, *LeadingAge*

Roslyn Quarto, *ESOP*

Michael Tobin, *US Attorney's Office for Northern District of Ohio*

Contact Us

We welcome your feedback!
Please share questions, suggestions or concerns.

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brief examines ways in which older Americans can enjoy longer lives by “maximizing their physical, mental, and social well-being,” according to the White House Conference on Aging blog post. The long-term services and supports policy brief covers five key areas:

- informal caregiving
- formal services and supports
- direct care workers
- access to information and services
- financing long-term services and supports

Policy briefs on elder justice and retirement security will be released in the coming weeks. To read the policy briefs, visit: whitehouseconferenceonaging.gov/blog

Medicare Advantage Rate Increase Decided

A decision was announced on April 6 by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to increase the rate reimbursement for Medicare Advantage plans by 1.25 percent for 2016. This represented a reversal of their earlier proposal, which would have reduced the rate reimbursements by 0.95 percent. Strong bipartisan groups of over 200 members of the House and 40 members of the Senate sent letters to CMS expressing opposition to the proposed cuts. Medicare Advantage has reached record high enrollment each year since 2010, a trend which continues in 2015. Medicare Advantage enrollment has had a cumulative increase of more than 40 percent since 2010. During the same time period, premiums have decreased by nearly 6 percent.

HHS to Award \$201 Million in Navigator Grants

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said last month that it expects to award up to \$201 million in grants over the next three years for Affordable Care Act navigators in states which have exchanges operated by the federal government or in partnership with the federal government. The grant announcement posted in April said that there will be \$67 million in grants available during the first year, an amount similar to previous years. Texas and Florida are slated to get the largest amounts, each state receiving close to \$10 million. All states will receive at least \$600,000.

IOM Report on Cognitive Aging Released

An Institute on Medicine (IOM) report titled “Cognitive Aging: Progress in Understanding and Opportunities for Action” was released on April 14. It identifies “cognitive aging,” the gradual change in mental function with age rather than a neurological disease, as one of the most challenging health issues that older adults face. The report says that aging can affect mental abilities positively as well as negatively. It notes that studies on whether cognitive stimulation and training can make a difference in a person’s daily activity have mixed results and suggests that products claiming to boost memory or other mental tasks “require careful evaluation by consumers and in regulatory review.” The full report is available for free online at: iom.edu/reports.