

Protecting the Health of America's Older Adults During COVID-19 and Beyond Act

Older adults represent a high-risk group for COVID-19 as they have higher hospitalization and mortality rates than any other population. Current U.S. recommendations for older adults to stay home can have unintended consequences that could worsen their health. In addition, older adults who contract COVID-19 and have mild to moderate symptoms are generally encouraged to stay home and avoid going to a health care provider's office or the emergency room. Such self-care for this population – especially for those living alone – can be difficult and dangerous. Public health interventions can play a valuable role in optimizing the health and well-being of older adults during this time by supporting independence and fostering cross-sector collaboration with the aging sector.

The Protecting the Health of America's Older Adults During COVID-19 and Beyond Act would address these complex needs by establishing a National COVID-19 Resource Center for Older Adults under the leadership of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and a Healthy Aging grant program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

National COVID-19 Resource Center for Older Adults:

Currently, there is no centralized and coordinated federal entity to ensure that the range of needs for older adults are being addressed. Funding of hospitals, nursing homes, community support agencies and public health departments is essential, but insufficient. A National COVID-19 Resource Center for Older Adults would fill these gaps by fostering collaboration among sectors, including the identification and dissemination of evidence-based practices to assess the most vulnerable older adults, limit exposure of older adults and their caregivers to COVID-19, and better care for older adults who are infected.

The Resource Center would be composed of senior officials from several agencies across multiple secretariats, including the Administration for Community Living/Administration on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Center should tap the expertise of state, territorial, local and tribal officials and non-governmental experts in its deliberations. The Resource Center would be authorized for \$10 million annually through FY2024. The center would:

- Develop best practices for older adult health and well-being during the COVID-19 response and beyond.
- Adapt and develop innovative services to overcome the risks associated with social isolation, improved access to screening, testing, and health care services and resources and prioritizing venues older adults can reach, expansion of telemedicine options beyond what is currently covered, and supporting family caregivers who now have additional responsibilities for homebound individuals.
- Create and disseminate tools and provide technical assistance to adopt these best practices throughout the nation.
- Identify federal resources and mechanisms to assist states and local communities in establishing their own parallel, multi-sector coordination activities to carry out the identified federal best practices.
- Develop formal learning networks of practitioners at the hospital, nursing facility, and community levels to rapidly disseminate best practices and ensure implementation of standards, norms, and best practices to reduce morbidity and mortality of older adults affected by COVID-19.

CDC Healthy Aging Grant Program

A Healthy Aging Grant Program at CDC would support state, local, territorial and tribal public health departments to promote older adult health and well-being. Grant funding would enable state and local health departments to build aging expertise and apply an aging lens to their existing work including the response to COVID-19.

Currently, no program exists at CDC to fund work targeted at the overall health and well-being of older adults. The establishment of this grant program would allow state, local, territorial and tribal public health departments to create innovative strategies to promote the health of this population, as well as align their work with delivery of services in the aging sector. The program would be authorized for \$20 million annually from FY21-25. Activities would include:

- Documenting and disseminating data related to the health status of older adults and health disparities in the older adult population
- Partnering with health and non-health sectors to create conditions that lessen risk factors for chronic illness, social isolation, health care costs
- Implementing evidence-based programs and policies that prevent illnesses and injuries and improve the health and well-being of older adults
- Improving coordination of interventions to identify gaps and reduce duplication of efforts at federal, local, and state agencies and with other aging services organizations
- Providing grants to state, local, territorial and tribal public health departments, and other relevant organizations as needed to provide staffing and support to:
 - Regularly assess and produce reports highlighting health-related needs including those associated with social, economic and environmental factors;
 - Identify sub-populations requiring customized responses especially those with elevated risks or disparities in health;
 - Examine and, when needed, fill gaps in existing public health prevention programs and policies;
 - Implement public health programs to address chronic disease, falls, nutrition and physical activity, social isolation and caregiver support;
 - Incorporate the needs of vulnerable older adults into emergency preparedness plans and activities;
 - Promote public health partnerships with aging services organizations to ensure non-duplication of efforts and increase efficiency;
 - Link the health and community services sectors to promote wellness, provide needed care and reduce health care costs;
 - Promote policies that address social and economic conditions to improve health and quality of life and foster independence;
- Providing educational resources and technical assistance to state, local, territorial and tribal public health departments and other organizations.
- Actively supporting and participating in aging-related activities at the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Community Living and, as appropriate, other agencies.
- Establishing a coordinating body within CDC for its centers, divisions and offices to strengthen and guide healthy aging efforts across the Agency.
- Evaluating activities to determine their impact on health, inequities, well-being and cost.