

# AARP Advocacy Agenda *Across the States*

# 2014

## INTRODUCTION

AARP is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all as we age so that people live with dignity and purpose and fulfill their goals and dreams. One of the ways AARP pursues its mission is through advocacy led by our state offices located in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This agenda provides an overview of the key advocacy issues AARP will advance in states across the country in 2014.

## SUPPORTING FAMILY CAREGIVERS



Today, more than 42 million family caregivers provide an estimated \$450 billion in unpaid care for their loved ones. There are simple, yet profound, supports that can enhance caregivers' quality of life and allow individuals needing care to continue to live independently in their homes and not in costly institutionalized settings. That's why AARP is embarking on a multi-state effort to advance a legislative resolution in support of family caregivers.

Specifically, we will call on state leaders to appoint a task force to assess the programs and supports their states have in place to address the needs of family caregivers and to develop recommendations on how to enhance those supports.

Family caregivers play a critical role in care transitions, as their loved ones move from hospitals to rehabilitation centers and back home. Today, nearly 50 percent of family caregivers are being called on to perform medical/nursing tasks, often with little or no explanation or guidance. That's why AARP will be working with state lawmakers to enact the Care-giver Advise, Record and Enable (CARE) Act ensuring that hospitals and care facilities formally acknowledge a patient's family caregiver at the time of admission; providing that caregiver with an opportunity to play a role in developing a plan of care for their loved one; notifying the family caregiver at the time of discharge or transition; and, providing them with a live demonstration of the medical/nursing tasks they will need to perform at home. Ensuring caregivers get the instruction they need and are notified about care transitions may reduce costly hospital readmissions.

Other changes that would help family caregivers support their loved ones:

- » Increased funding for respite care services so family caregivers have the opportunity to take necessary and hard-earned breaks;

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Real Possibilities

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- » The adoption of workplace policies that promote workplace flexibility for caregivers;
- » Assessment of caregiver needs in developing the plan of care;
- » Reducing the financial burden of caregivers through tax credits; and,
- » Permitting a home care worker to perform certain tasks that could otherwise only be performed by a licensed nurse.

## HELPING PEOPLE STAY IN THEIR OWN HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

Research shows that the vast majority of individuals want to stay in their homes for as long as possible as they age. That's why AARP believes that no one should be forced out of their home in order to receive



the care or assistance they need. AARP is calling on state lawmakers to improve the balance of funding for services provided in the home and community by redirecting spending as appropriate away from costly nursing home care and towards supports and services in the community.

AARP's advocacy focus is on:

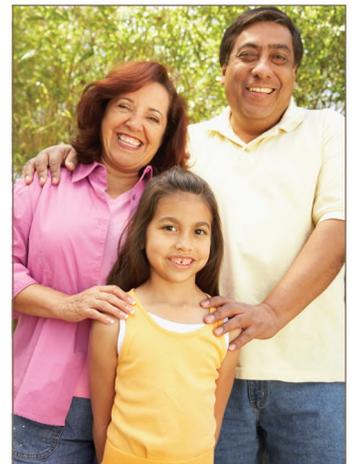
- » Encouraging states to take advantage of new and existing opportunities and federal financial incentives to improve access to services provided in the home and community;
- » Including consumer-directed care, home health, and personal care services;
- » Promoting efforts to help seniors and their family caregivers understand their care options;

- » Addressing racial disparities in who receives services in their homes and communities and enhancing their quality of care; and,
- » Expanding and improving the quality of the direct care workforce.

## DESIGNING COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES

In order to meet the demands and to tackle the future challenges of our aging society, we know that we will need to make adjustments to services and infrastructure. In short, we need more “livable communities.”

Citizens of all ages benefit from barrier-free buildings and streets as well as from having more convenient access to services, local businesses, and green spaces. AARP's advocacy includes efforts to adopt “Complete Streets,” also known as “Safe Streets,” legislation at the state and local levels in line with AARP's model legislation, as well as the promotion of effective transportation planning, coordination, and funding to address the needs of all residents, especially those living in rural communities. In addition, the adoption of housing design standards in line with AARP's model legislation can make housing more accessible, easier to use, and more livable for persons of all ages and physical abilities.



## ENHANCING RETIREMENT SECURITY

AARP is fighting to put a secure retirement within reach for people who work hard and plan for their future. Americans continue to struggle to save for a secure retirement. Three out of five families headed

by a person 65 or older have no money in retirement savings accounts, and more than 70 million workers do not have any type of employer-sponsored retirement plan. AARP is advocating for commonsense state solutions that would enable more workers to save for retirement at work. Several states have created study commissions to explore a variety of options to afford employers and their employees with low-cost savings options. AARP advocates for enactment of Work and Save plans that provide a convenient way for people to save on the job, and to continue to save if they change jobs.

In the public sector, AARP is fighting to protect retirees from cuts to the benefits and cost of living adjustments they were promised, and to preserve defined benefit plans. AARP supports efforts to shore up underfunded pension systems, but any changes must be fiscally responsible, ensure the long-term viability of existing defined-benefit plans, and protect the financial security of workers and retirees. AARP is especially attentive to workers who have contributed to a pension plan for a significant time or who are in or close to retirement. These individuals have little opportunity or time to make different retirement savings choices and should not be penalized by benefit cuts.



## **FIGHTING FOR CONSUMER SAVINGS AND PROTECTIONS**

Expenditures on utilities are becoming a larger portion of the household budget for those aged 50 and older. That's why AARP is fighting for fair and reasonable utility rates, and safe and reliable services. Over

the past few years, our advocacy has resulted in an estimated \$3 billion in savings for consumers.

AARP will continue its utilities advocacy efforts with an emphasis on:

- » Defeating or mitigating unfair rate increases and rate structures for utility customers;
- » Opposing advanced payments for multi-billion dollar power plants;
- » Ensuring that consumers in retail choice markets have consumer protections, including access to stable, affordable standard offer service;
- » Advocating for "smart meter" consumer protections, including prohibitions on mandatory or opt-out time of use rates and prepayment service;
- » Advocating for the establishment of and funding for independent state utility consumer advocate offices to represent residential consumers;
- » Supporting the Lifeline and universal service telephone assistance programs;
- » Opposing legislation that would unfairly deregulate basic phone or retail electric and gas service;
- » Ensuring the preservation of key consumer protections in the telecommunications market transition; and,
- » Ensuring that providers of electricity, gas, landline, wireless, and broadband offer services customers can depend on.



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## PREVENTING FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION AND ELDER ABUSE

To help safeguard older Americans from financial abuse, AARP is focusing on:

- » Enacting laws that help prevent, detect, report and address financial exploitation;
- » Supporting increased criminal and civil penalties against financial exploitation;
- » Enacting laws that preserves funding for adult protective services; and,
- » Strengthening guardianship and power of attorney laws by adopting the Uniform Adult Guardianship and Protective Proceedings Jurisdiction Act, the Uniform Power of Attorney Act, and other comprehensive reforms like improved funding for public guardianship.

## ACCESSING AFFORDABLE HEALTH COVERAGE AND IMPROVING QUALITY



AARP supports measures to help consumers access affordable and quality health coverage. During the Great Recession, millions of workers lost their health care coverage when they lost their jobs. Among them were older workers age 50-64, who continue to struggle to find new employment opportunities. In 2014, many of these individuals will

be eligible for health insurance coverage under the new Medicaid option to cover individuals and families with incomes up to \$15,000 a year. To date, more than half of the states have adopted this new option, and AARP urges state lawmakers in the remaining states to extend this critical health coverage to their citizens.

Working with state lawmakers, AARP is pursuing quality improvement initiatives to:

- » Ensure consumers can access affordable health coverage through the new health marketplaces;
- » Improve care transitions from hospital to home;
- » Expand patient-centered care coordination programs such as medical homes;
- » Fight fraud and abuse in health programs;
- » Reduce health disparities; and,
- » Protect the privacy and security of electronic health records.

## FIGHTING FOR BUDGET AND TAX FAIRNESS

AARP is committed to ensuring that reforms made to state tax structures are fair and safeguard the financial security of the 50+ population. As states address both the revenue and spending sides of the budget, a balanced approach is essential. Furthermore, states should not formally tie essential spending programs to unstable revenue sources. AARP opposes arbitrary and inflexible state and local tax and expenditure limits, such as the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) initiatives.



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