

# Aging Matters

## REGION I

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## Five Questions to Ask The Candidates on Senior Issues



Before Americans cast their ballots in November, the National Council on Aging (NCOA) urges them to ask the Presidential and Congressional candidates how they

will tackle five of the most pressing challenges facing our nation's older population and their families.

"These issues are not just about seniors—they are about the health and security of all American families," said Howard Bedlin, NCOA vice president for Public Policy & Advocacy. "Our population is aging rapidly, and every candidate running for office must have plans to address these challenges. It's up to every voter to ask them for details."

### 1. Long-Term Care

Millions of Americans will need some long-term care services in their lifetime. Yet, most do not realize that Medicare does not cover these costs, and private insurance is unaffordable for many. Too often, seniors are forced to impoverish themselves to get assistance from Medicaid. In addition, access to home care is limited because of Medicaid's institutional bias. The result is that burdens on family caregivers are only getting worse. ***What to ask the candidate:*** What are your plans to address America's growing long-term care crisis for families?

### 2. Funding for Senior Programs

Senior programs—such as home-delivered meals, falls prevention, and caregiver support—keep older adults healthy, secure, and independent in their own homes. They also help families who are juggling elder care with other responsibilities. Yet, senior services are drastically underfunded with growing waiting lists under recent budget caps. ***What to ask the candidate:*** What will you do to reverse the downward trend in support of aging services and make overdue investments in programs that support seniors' health and economic security?

## Five Questions to Ask the Candidates on Senior Issues



### 3. Medicare Low-Income Protections

Half of Medicare beneficiaries have incomes below \$24,500. Yet, on average, they must pay more than \$5,000 annually

out-of-pocket for their health care needs. These seniors face impossible decisions each month on whether to spend their limited incomes on medicine, food, or rent.

**What to ask the candidate:** What are your plans to strengthen Medicare to ensure that seniors with low incomes who are struggling to make ends meet can afford their health care needs?

### 4. Senior Hunger

More than nine million older adults face the threat of hunger, yet three in five seniors eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps) are not enrolled in the benefit. Others face fewer home-delivered meals and long waiting lists to participate.

**What to ask the candidate:** What are your plans to improve vulnerable seniors' access to the nutritious food necessary for maintaining their health and independence?

### 5. Social Security

Social Security is the most effective anti-poverty program in U.S. history, keeping 21 million people out of poverty each year. Still, a substantial number of seniors, particularly women and African Americans, rely on Social Security for most or all of their retirement income. This fixed income often isn't enough to make ends meet, leaving many American seniors struggling to get by.

**What to ask the candidate:** How do you plan to strengthen Social Security so it better serves the most vulnerable seniors and their families?

To find more information about how to get involved during the election cycle or for more information about advocating for senior issues, go to [ncoa.org/Election16](http://ncoa.org/Election16).

## CDC Announces Critical Component in Elder Abuse Fight

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released the much-anticipated [Elder Abuse Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Core Data Elements \(PDF\)](#).

The field of elder justices has long struggled with the challenge of comparing data from different jurisdictions or sources, each of which uses their own definition of “abuse” or “neglect.” By establishing and normalizing consistent definitions and data elements, it should become easier to compare apples to apples in order to better understand, and more effectively combat, elder abuse.

CDC worked with a wide range of stakeholders, including ACL, to develop these recommendations, which are consistent with ACL's [National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System \(NAMRS\)](#)

## OAA Letter Gains Bipartisan Support



Thanks to all the n4a advocates who reached out to their Republican Representatives to encourage them to sign on to the Nolan-Gibson letter, urging House leaders to move an Older Americans Act reauthorization bill promptly.

Our collective efforts were successful, as 65 Representatives signed the letter, nearly half of whom are Republicans. This bipartisan balance was critical to ensuring the letter was well-received by House Education and Workforce Committee leaders Chairman John Kline (R-MN) and Ranking Minority Member Bobby Scott (D-VA) and, ultimately, influential in helping move the House's consideration of OAA along.

As n4a has reported, the Committee has been working on a House version of the Senate-passed S. 192, but legislation has not yet been released. n4a policy staff are working very closely with Committee staff and other advocates to ensure that OAA advances this spring and is finalized this year.



## TSCL's Three Legislative Wins for Disabled and Older Americans

By Jessie Gibbons, Senior Policy Analyst



Last year was a busy and successful one for The Senior Citizens League (TSCL). Three major legislative efforts that had our support were effectively tackled by lawmakers in Congress and signed into law by President Obama.

First, in the spring, Members of Congress passed legislation to repeal and replace the sustainable growth rate (SGR) – a flawed formula that set payment rates for doctors who treated Medicare patients. Because of the quirks in the law, doctors were faced with double-digit cuts year after year. Some stopped seeing new Medicare patients, and some even stopped participating in Medicare altogether. TSCL advocated for the SGR's repeal for more than a decade, and we were ecstatic to see it replaced once and for all last April. The law took effect immediately and, in the coming years, it will bring increased stability to the Medicare program for both patients and their doctors.

Second, in October, Congress passed legislation to strengthen Social Security's Disability Insurance (DI) program. Many of the recommendations that TSCL made to the House Ways and Means Committee back in August were signed into law, including provisions that will ramp up fraud prevention and test new work incentives for beneficiaries. Most importantly, the law prevents a 20 percent benefit cut that was scheduled to hit 11 million disabled beneficiaries in December 2016. A cut of that size would have been truly devastating for enrollees, and TSCL applauds Members of Congress for averting it.

Third, TSCL was pleased that Congress passed legislation last fall to stave off a 52 percent hike in Medicare Part B premiums for around 15 million beneficiaries. Back in October, our legislative team hand delivered letters to every office on Capitol Hill urging lawmakers to prevent the abrupt and dramatic premium increase. We were pleased when legislation was signed into law later that month to provide relief for the millions of Medicare beneficiaries who would have otherwise seen massive cost increases in January.

These success stories would not have been possible without the support from tens of thousands of advocates like you who are banding together with TSCL to protect Social Security and Medicare. Once again, TSCL's legislative team has big goals this year. Since the Social Security Administration (SSA) announced seniors would not receive a benefit increase in 2016, we have been advocating tirelessly for an emergency cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Social Security beneficiaries. Two bills that are now before Congress – the *Seniors Deserve a Raise Act* (H.R. 3761) and the *SAVE Benefits Act* (S. 2251, H.R. 4012) – would provide benefit increases of 2.9 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively. In the months ahead we will continue to encourage lawmakers to sign these bills into law because retired and disabled Americans *need* relief this year.

In addition, we will be urging lawmakers to adopt legislation that would result in more fair and accurate COLAs in the future. Several bills before Congress would accomplish this, including the *CPI-E Act* (H.R. 3351), the *Guaranteed 3% COLA Act* (H.R. 3588), the *Social Security 2100 Act* (S. 1904, H.R. 1391), and the *Social Security Expansion Act* (S. 731). TSCL believes each of these bills would go a long way in ensuring the retirement security seniors have earned and deserve.

To stay updated on TSCL's legislative efforts and their progress in Congress, visit the [Legislative News](#) section of our website. You can also find us on Facebook or Twitter for more frequent legislative updates.

### Robert W. Jackson Senior Conference

*The Dates for the 2016 Robert W. Jackson Senior Conference are May 17-19*

The late Robert W. Jackson was one of West Virginia's most recognized senior advocates; he worked tirelessly both in state government and in the private sector to ensure improvements in policy, planning and services to seniors.

In his honor the Bureau sponsors the Robert W. Jackson Senior Conference each year to provide workshops and activities for seniors from around the state.

For more information, please contact your local senior center or Robin Strickland at the Bureau of Senior Services at 304-554-3317.



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### *2016 Older Americans Month Theme and Logo Announced*

May is a month of fresh beginnings. Perennials bloom once again, blazing a trail of bright color. Here at the Administration for Community Living (ACL), May is Older American's Month (OAM), a time to celebrate the perennial contributions of older adults to the nation. The 2016 theme is *[Blaze a Trail](#)*, and in May we will take the opportunity to raise awareness about issues facing older adults, and highlight the way older Americans are advocating for themselves, their peers, and their communities.

ACL blazed a trail of its own this year by creating an evergreen OAM Logo. The goal is to create a recognizable brand that can be carried over from one observance to the next, even though specific themes will be chosen each year. The new OAM logo reflects the tone of the month, and ACL's vision, perfectly - people celebrating and helping one another to thrive. And, the blaze-like shape made by the figures seems especially appropriate for OAM 2016.

