



Older Americans Act Reauthorization Recommendations

March 2011

The programs administered through the Older Americans Act are critical to supporting the economic security of older Americans, persons with disabilities and their families. The range of services authorized through the Act, including home-delivered and congregate meals, long-term care supports, job training, transportation assistance and other programs, allow Americans to fill income gaps and remain in their homes and communities. The 2011 reauthorization of the Act presents an opportunity to improve these programs through the use of an innovative economic security framework and tools.

The Elder Economic Security Initiative™ (Initiative) led by Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) offers a conceptual framework and concrete tools to shape policies and programs to promote the economic well-being of elders and their families. Through the Initiative, WOW works with coalitions in seventeen states, representing over 700 community-based advocates and service providers, to carry out advocacy, outreach and education strategies to build elder economic security at the national, state and local levels.

Underpinning the Initiative is the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index), developed by WOW and the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Drawing from publicly available national and state data sources, the Elder Index provides county-by-county data on the real cost-of-living for elders (age 65+) living in the community. The Elder Index incorporates the cost of housing, health care, transportation, food and other basic needs, including add-on costs for home and community-based long-term care. The Elder Index is specific to household size, geographic area and life circumstances.

Wider Opportunities for Women recommends:

TITLE I:

Establish **economic security** as a goal of the Older Americans Act. Define **economic security** as having the income, resources and services and supports necessary to meet all basic needs, including housing, health care, transportation, food, miscellaneous essentials and, when necessary, long-term care.

Measure “economic need” as having an income at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. Meet the Act’s goal of directing services to those with the greatest economic and social need, including older adults with low-incomes, by focusing on those with incomes that fall short of **economic security**.

Instruct the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to re-visit the methodology and data collection for the experimental Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (developed in 1987 via reauthorization of the Older Americans Act) to account for elders’ true expenses. Also instruct BLS to develop a complementary measure of **economic security** for elders.

TITLE II:

Strengthen the work and effectiveness of the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Aging to integrate and coordinate federal programs serving older Americans by:

- Requiring that the committee meet quarterly;
- Requiring the participation of representatives from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Health and Human Services Office on Disability, and Federal Transit Administration in addition to those already required in the Act;
- Charging the Committee with unifying and coordinating activities of multiple agencies and recommending and drafting necessary regulatory and legislative changes to stabilize, expand and strengthen the direct-care workforce; and
- Charging the Committee with creating an inventory of all federal programs aimed at reducing poverty and increasing the **economic security** of older adults; unifying and coordinating the activities of agencies administering such programs; analyzing federal program effectiveness against a goal of **economic security** that draws on a concrete measure, **using a methodology such as WOW's Elder Economic Security Standard Index**; and recommending and drafting the necessary regulatory and legislative changes to increase **economic security** of vulnerable and economically disadvantaged older adults.

TITLE III:

Allow State Units on Aging and Area Agencies on Aging, in consultation with the state unit, **to use a locally determined measure of economic security** to measure economic need and target services in their state and area plans.

TITLE IV:

Authorize and provide funding for the Assistant Secretary to establish an **economic security** resource center to test innovative practices in planning, evaluation and service delivery using a **locally-determined measure of economic security**. Funding will build on existing practices by State Units on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging and other community-based service providers to incorporate an **economic security** framework and measure in the Act's programs through a national clearinghouse of best practices and targeted technical assistance. The resource center will:

- Create an **economic security** evidence-base;
- Pilot test uses of a **locally determined measure of economic need** in the Act's programs; and
- Build the capacity of the network to target services to economically vulnerable populations.