

AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY
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Outside Witness Testimony – Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

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Outside Witness Testimony for FY 2024 Appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services

- **Geriatrics Education and Training Programs**
- **National Institutes of Health / National Institute on Aging**

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The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) greatly appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony. The AGS is a national non-profit organization of nearly 6,000 geriatrics healthcare professionals and basic and clinical researchers dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older Americans. The AGS believes in a just society – one where we all are supported by and able to contribute to communities and where ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of bias and discrimination no longer impact healthcare access, quality, and outcomes for older adults and their caregivers. As the Subcommittee works on its fiscal year (FY) 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, **we ask that you prioritize funding for the geriatrics education and training programs under Title VII of the Public Health Services (PHS) Act and for aging research within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Institute on Aging (NIA).**

We are appreciative of your ongoing support of the Title VII Geriatrics Health Professions Programs at the Health Resources and Services Agency (HRSA), which includes the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) and Geriatrics Academic Career Award (GACA) program. However, the AGS believes it is urgent that we increase the educational and training opportunities in geriatrics and gerontology and ensure that HRSA receives the funding expansion necessary for these critically important programs for the care and health of older adults.

We ask that the Subcommittee consider the following funding levels for these programs in FY 2024:

- **\$82 million to support the GWEP and GACA program (PHS Act Title VII, Section 750 and 753 (a)).**
- **\$50.924 billion for the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) foundational work and a minimum increase of \$321 million for research on Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD) over the enacted FY 2023 level.**

Sustained and enhanced federal investment in these initiatives is essential to delivering high-quality, better coordinated, efficient, and cost-effective care to our older Americans whose numbers are projected to increase dramatically in the coming years. The number of people 65 and older is estimated to climb from 61.6 million today to more than 94.7 million by 2060, while those 85 and older is projected more than double from 7.1 million today to 19 million by 2060.¹ As our aging population grows, the prevalence of diseases disproportionately affecting older people—most notably Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (including vascular, Lewy body, and frontotemporal dementia)—and economic burden associated with these diseases will increase.

To ensure that our nation is prepared to meet the unique healthcare needs of this rapidly growing population, we request that Congress provide additional investments necessary to expand and enhance the geriatrics workforce, an integral component of the primary care workforce, and foster groundbreaking medical research on aging.

PROGRAMS TO TRAIN GERIATRICS HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

GWEP and GACA Program (\$82 million)

Our healthcare workforce receives little, if any, training in geriatric principles,² leaving us ill-prepared to care for older adults as health needs evolve. With the severe shortage of geriatrics healthcare providers and academics with the expertise to train these providers, the AGS believes it is urgent that we increase the number of educational and training opportunities in geriatrics and gerontology. By 2025, there will only be approximately one geriatrician for every 3,000 older adults that require geriatrics care, leaving thousands without access to these services by 2025.³ There are similar shortages of health professionals specializing in geriatrics across other disciplines. Additionally, rural populations have more limited access to primary care than residents of urban areas, and are generally older, have a higher incidence of poor health, and face greater barriers to receiving care such as transportation and internet access. The requested increase in funding levels would help to expand the critically important GWEPs and GACAs commensurate with the increasing need.

The GWEP is currently the only federal program designed to increase the number of providers, in a variety of disciplines, with the skills and training to care for older adults. The GWEP awardees educate and engage the broader frontline workforce, including the caregiving workforce and family caregivers, and focus on opportunities to improve the quality of care delivered to older adults, particularly in underserved and rural areas. Due to the GWEPs’ partnerships with primary care and community-based organizations, they are uniquely positioned to rapidly address the needs of older

¹U.S. Census Bureau International Programs Center. International Database (IDB). Accessed May 1, 2023. https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/#/pop?COUNTRY_YEAR=2023&COUNTRY_YR_ANIM=2023&FIPS_SINGLE=US&FIPS=US&popPages=BYAGE&POP_YEARS=2023,2060&menu=popViz&ageGroup=O.

² Only 3 percent of medical students take even one class in geriatric medicine and fewer than 1 percent of RNs, pharmacists, physician assistances and physical therapists are certified in geriatrics or gerontology. Yet estimates are that by 2030, 3.5 million additional health care professionals and direct-care workers will be needed to care for older adults. 2018 Issue Brief, Eldercare Workforce Alliance, Available at https://eldercareworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GWEP_OnePager_v2.pdf.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. National and Regional Projects of Supply and Demand for Geriatricians: 2013-2025. Published April 2017. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/geriatrics-report-51817.pdf>.

adults and their caregivers. The GWEP was launched in 2015 by HRSA with 44 three-year grants provided to awardees in 29 states. In 2019, HRSA funded a second cohort of 48 GWEPs across 35 states and two territories (Guam and Puerto Rico) and provided extension grants to 15 former GWEP awardees. Additional funding would allow 80 GWEPs at \$950,000 per program, enabling every state to have a GWEP and more rural and underserved areas of the country to have access to geriatrics training and expertise.

The GACA program is an essential complement to the GWEP. GACAs ensure we can equip early-career clinician educators to become leaders in geriatrics education and research. It is the only federal program designed to increase the number of faculty with geriatrics expertise in a variety of disciplines. The program was eliminated in 2015 through a consolidation of several training programs. However, the program was reestablished in November 2018 and most recently, HRSA funded 26 GACAs for four years through June 30, 2027. Additional funding would allow 60 GACAs at \$100,000 per award, ensuring we have a larger and more geographically diverse pipeline of geriatrics research and training expertise with the incentives and resources needed to grow the field.

As demonstrated during the COVID-19 public health emergency, GWEPs and GACAs are critical in providing assistance for proactive public health planning with their geriatrics' expertise and knowledge of long-term care and can help ensure states and local governments have improved plans for older adults in disaster preparedness for future pandemics and natural disasters. As the U.S. population rapidly ages, access to a well-trained workforce and appropriate care for medically complex older adults is imperative to maintaining the health and quality of life for this growing segment of the nation's population.

To address these issues, we urge the Subcommittee to provide a FY 2024 appropriation of \$82 million for the GWEP and GACA program. This increase in funding over FY 2023 levels would help ensure that HRSA receives the funding necessary to carry these critically important programs forward. Additional funding will also allow HRSA to expand the number of GWEPs and GACAs and move towards closing the current geographic and demographic gaps in geriatrics workforce training. Given the increasing diversity among older people⁴ and rapid growth of the older population,¹ the need for a diverse workforce as well as training in geriatrics and gerontology will continue to increase. The infrastructure of care in the U.S. needs substantial investments so that access to long-term services and supports is expanded while the healthcare workforce is adequately supported and prepared to care for us all as we age.

RESEARCH FUNDING INITIATIVES

NIH / NIA (\$50.924 billion for base spending and a minimum increase of \$321 million for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias research)

The institutes that make up NIH, specifically the National Institute on Aging (NIA), lead the national scientific effort to understand the nature of aging and extend the healthy, active years of life. As a member of the Friends of the NIA (FoNIA)—a broad-based coalition of aging, disease, research, and patient groups committed to advancing medical research that affects millions of older Americans—the AGS urges you to include at least \$50.924 billion for base funding and a minimum increase of \$321 million for research on ADRD over the enacted FY 2023 level.

⁴ Matthews KA, Xu W, Gaglioti AH, et al. Racial and Ethnic Estimates of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in the United States (2015-2060) in Adults Aged >=65 Years. *Alzheimers Dement*. 2019;15(1):17-24. [doi:10.1016/j.jalz.2018.06.3063](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jalz.2018.06.3063)

Healthcare costs associated with age-related diseases are significant and rising. By 2060, for example, the number of people age 65 and older affected by Alzheimer’s disease is estimated to reach 13.85 million cases⁵—more than double the estimated 6.7 million in 2023—and is projected to cost \$1 trillion in 2050 which does not include the current \$339.5 billion in unpaid caregiving by family and friends.⁶ Further, chronic diseases related to aging, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer continue to afflict 80 percent of people age 65 and older.⁷ Forty percent of Medicare beneficiaries have four or more chronic conditions and account for 78 percent of Medicare expenditures.⁸ Continued and increased federal investments in scientific research will ensure that the NIH and NIA have the resources to conduct groundbreaking research, foster the development of research and clinical scientists, provide research resources, and communicate information about aging and advances in research on aging. Breakthroughs from NIH research can not only delay the onset of costly age-related diseases but also can save trillions of dollars by the middle of the current century.

Additionally, the AGS urges you to ensure that any funding for the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) does not come at the cost of the existing NIH institutes and centers. We believe that a meaningful increase in NIH-wide funding, in combination with aging and increase in prevalence of diseases, will be vital to sustain the research needed to make progress in addressing chronic disease and ADRD that disproportionately affect older people.

Strong support such as yours will help ensure that every older American is able to receive high-quality care. We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

⁵ Rajan KB, Weuve J, Barnes LL, McAninch EA, Wilson RS, Evans DA. Population estimate of people with clinical AD and mild cognitive impairment in the United States (2020-2060). *Alzheimers Dement.* 2021;17(12):1966-1975. [doi:10.1002/alz.12362](https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.12362)

⁶ Alzheimer’s Association. 2023 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures. *Alzheimers Dement.* 2023;19(4):1-98. [doi:10.1002/alz.13016](https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.13016)

⁷ National Prevention Council. Healthy Aging in Action: Advancing the National Prevention Strategy. Published November 2016. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/healthy-aging-in-action508.pdf> [page 11].

⁸ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions Charts: 2018. Updated December 1, 2021. Accessed May 1, 2023. https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/Chartbook_Charts.