



## Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging State Legislative Priorities 2021

### Fund Essential Services for Older Adults During COVID-19

The Illinois Association of Area Agencies is requesting level funding in the amount of \$2 million for nutrition programs; an additional \$1 million for social isolation programs, and an additional \$1 million for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders. During these unprecedented times, demand for these programs has skyrocketed.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois' Area Agencies on Aging have:

- Experienced a 70% increase in statewide demand for the Home Delivered Meals Program;
- Developed new programs to address Social Isolation, which can be as physically and psychologically harmful as disease;
- Taken steps to alleviate the burdens on Family Caregivers.

The majority of the increased funding for Home Delivered Meals came from the federal CARES Act through the Illinois Department on Aging to the Area Agencies on Aging. **Those funds have been expended but the increased demand still exists.** Without sufficient funding, the Area Agencies will not be able to meet the demand for these programs that are critical to older adults, especially those living independently in their own homes.

### Strengthen Family Caregiver Support

The Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging is requesting \$6 million in state funding (HB 293 and SB 1766) to assist family caregivers under the Illinois Family Caregiver Act. Family caregivers are unpaid, in-home family members who care for their loved ones and are essential to helping older adults stay in their communities longer. The ability to care for their loved ones at home has been proven to delay nursing home placement and save costly Medicaid funds.

It has been estimated that 1.5 million family caregivers provide 1.4 billion of unpaid care annually in Illinois. During the COVID-19 pandemic, statewide participation in caregiver programs increased by 124%. Family caregivers often experience tremendous emotional and physical stress, which can lead to burnout and other seriously negative effects.

These new state dollars would be used to identify, through evidence-based software and resources, those family caregivers at high risk. Those persons would then be provided with individualized strategies and care plans for their loved ones. Several proven methodologies exist; and while federal dollars have been available for caregiver programs, **there has never been state funding for this program since the Illinois Family Caregiver Act (320 ILCS 65) became law in 2004.**

### Support Efforts Related to COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Education and Outreach

The Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging will strongly support efforts related to the COVID-19 vaccine distribution, education and outreach. Older adults nationwide have been the population most seriously impacted by the pandemic. In Illinois, 78% of COVID-19 deaths have occurred in people 65 and older. Prioritizing residents of long-term care facilities, older adults living at home in their communities, and both paid and unpaid caregivers is an essential step in reducing death and serious illness from this terrible pandemic.