

## **GACA Report for April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 AZ4A Board Chair, Mary Beals Luedtka**

Greetings; thank you for giving the Area Agency on Aging Directors the opportunity to be with you during these meetings and bring to you updates on the status of services provided by the AAA's across the State.

### **Legislative updates**

AZ4A (the State Association of Area Agencies on Aging) has several on-going legislative priorities. First and foremost is our priority to obtain \$1.5 Million in on-going funding for home and community-based services. Both HB 2528 and SB 1536 were bills that championed this priority. HB 2528 passed by a bipartisan vote out of the House of Representatives of 42-17 and SB 1536 passed out of the Senate by a vote of 25-3. AZ4A also continues to champion the revitalization of Elderly Assistance Fund which is also being championed by Representative Carroll and Maricopa Treasurer Allen. AZ4A worked with stakeholders to introduce HB 2477, which passed out of the House by a vote of 45-14 and unanimously passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee. AZ4A continues to work with legislators and other stakeholders to discuss how these priorities might be represented in the end of session budget.

### **Recruitment & Retention of DCW's**

**Region One** has launched a Direct Care Worker Survey

The Agency has contracted with PHI, a national authority on the direct care workforce. PHI designed a survey that was sent to all direct care workers currently serving Area Agency clients in mid-February. Over 200 responses were received. PHI is in the process of analyzing and compiling survey data into a concise report with conclusions and recommendations to increase the recruitment and retention of direct care workers for Area Agency clients. The report should be finalized in May 2022.

**Region IV** continues to experience issues related to the Direct Care Worker shortage both with our Provider, and the AAA. For our Region in La Paz County and outlying areas of Mohave and Yuma Counties, turnover with the homecare staff leads to a Senior going on and off service and experiencing new care workers multiple times on a consistent basis.

With the implementation January 1<sup>st</sup> of the State's legislative appropriation of State General Funds to address the Direct Care Worker, workforce issues, rate increases and incentives, WACOG has not yet seen an impact in reducing the shortage to date. The rates increased by 4 dollars per unit with 3 dollars going directly to the Direct Care Worker's wages and employee related benefits, with a budget to also go for retention and hiring incentives. We are hopeful that we will see results of this effort in the coming months and also need sustainability of this effort through continued State General Fund appropriations.

### **Challenges**

Overall challenges for all the agencies are:

- 1) Lack of DCW's (Direct Care Workers)
- 2) Staff shortages within the AAA's
- 3) Increased aging population in Arizona (University of Arizona Eller College of Business shows that from 2010 – 2019 the population in Arizona over the age of 65 has increased by 48.4%, the largest growth in all of the different segments, i.e. Under 18 grew .07%; total population increased 13.9%)
- 4) Increased demand for services

- 5) Food insecurity: Region IV Senior Centers are maintaining an in-center COVID capacity ratio and offering a grab and go option as well. All providers have received additional American Rescue Plan funding in attempts to keep services open for the growing need. All Providers are concerned about sustained funding to continue service and the ever-increasing service levels. Without continued funding we may reach a “cliff” in which clients will have to be taken off service.
- 6) Increased food prices and limited availability of certain products.
- 7) Mental health and social isolation.
- 8) Emergency preparation for older adults – Prepping for weather risks, such as: wildfires, heatwaves, floods, storms, etc.
- 9) Affordable housing
- 10) Increased homelessness in older adults

## **Misc. Updates:**

### **Region ONE**

SCAN Grant : The Agency’s HIV Care Directions program received a \$15,000 emergency assistance grant from SCAN Health Plan to assist those 55 and older who are living with HIV. Funds can be used to help with rent, moving assistance, home modification, gas, assistive devices or other needs as approved.

Technology: The Agency has been testing senior friendly tablets from IN2L to help reduce social isolation. 55 tablets have been distributed. The Agency is also purchasing 100 iPads to help older adults connect through technology. The Arizona Community Foundation Season for Sharing program awarded the Agency \$7500 to use toward the implementation of technology.

**Region III.** Region III continues to struggle with staffing issues. The Region is still needing 5 Care Coordinators. The Care Coordinators are needed to assess clients and authorize services. We also need Ombudsman staffing. The Cost of Living and the lack of housing makes it particularly difficult to recruit in Flagstaff and Prescott

### **Region IV**

Rental/Utility Assistance: WACOG continues to partner with our Community Action Department to provide rental, utility, Weatherization and Home Modification assistance to Seniors who are Case Managed.

### **Region V**

In response to on-going and increased isolation experienced by seniors since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, PGCSA has begun researching options to offer its clients a “Virtual Senior Center” experience. The concept offers online experiences to engage seniors in the type of activities that they might otherwise participate in at their local senior center. The program is made available to home-bound seniors via on-line access and personal tablets. PGCSA is currently narrowing down the total costs associated with the project and exploring options for implementation.

**Jim Norris Central Kitchen Addition:** Construction of the addition of an external freezer started in February. A new concrete pad has been laid for the new freezer. The project is expected to be completed in April. Along with the addition of exterior freezer, the existing walk-in freezer/refrigerator will be retrofitted into a refrigerator only, and a brand-new walk-in exterior freezer will be added. One of the restrooms will be converted to additional storage.

PGCSA received approval from DES on a funding request to pay for the costs of the addition, which is currently estimated at \$133,000.

**State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) and Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP):** The annual Medicare Advantage Plan open enrollment began on January 1<sup>st</sup> and ended on March 31<sup>st</sup>. SHIP Counselors helped Medicare Advantage beneficiaries understand choices for 2022, assist with enrollment, review coverage and cost. During the enrollment period the SHIP Counselor has assisted more than 160 Medicare beneficiaries.

### ***Region VI***

SFY21 SEAGO-Area Agency on Aging Annual Report can be found at <https://www.seago.org/area-agency-on-aging>. SFY21 shows our Information and Referral count increased drastically, and our communities' needs increased over all. Please see our challenges and successes in our annual report.

Along with three of our Congregate sites, SEAGO-AAA celebrated 50 Years of the Senior Nutrition Program. These sites included the Santa Cruz Council on Aging (SCCOA) in Nogales, the Southeastern Arizona Community Unique Services (SEACUS) of Safford, and the Tombstone Senior Center.

### **Region VIII**

Title III & Title VI Virtual Monitoring of older adult services in 17 Tribal communities continues through April 2022.

Partnering with the National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA) to conduct a survey that gathers information on health and social needs of elders. Information will used for tribal planning, long-term care discussions, and the next Title VI grant application.

Tribal Reopening Project – ITCA-AAA created Reopening Guidance to assist with this transition and will provide technical assistance, as needed.

Alzheimer's Disease Programs Initiative (ADPI) grant is nearing the completion of the Year 1 planning phase. Powerful Tools for Caregivers Training and Dementia Education will begin in July 2022 for three Tribal communities.