



AT-A-GLANCE INSIGHTS

PUBLIC POLICY & AGING REPORT SYNOPSIS

Each quarter, the Gerontological Society of America's (GSA) *Public Policy & Aging Report* examines key policy issues affecting older people. We create a synopsis of the issue and provide key themes and answer possible policy actions that keep you informed on the evolving landscape of aging policy and discover ways to make an impact. This edition highlights a range of NIA-funded projects making critical contributions to understanding aging in a rapidly changing health, social, political, and technological environment. The NIA was founded in 1974 to support the cross-disciplinary study of aging across the life course.

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

NIA-Funded Alzheimer's Disease Research

While much of NIA-funded research on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) supports genetics and treatment research, NIA funds have also provided key support for ADRD policy-related research such as use of financial data for ADRD early detection; ADRD care and Medicare policy; ADRD and nursing home quality; and outcomes related to specialized ADRD care (Grabowski, 2024). Analysis of credit reporting data and Medicare claims data suggest factors that can lead to early detection of ADRD possibly years before clinical diagnosis. a. Other studies examine service use, quality, and patient satisfaction data comparing patients with ADRD covered under traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans, all of which can inform policy action to better serve individuals with ADRD and their families.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Continue funding ADRD research, specifically policy-related research that can lead to higher-quality, lower-cost care that better serves individual, organizational, and public policy goals.
- ✓ Maintain NIA investments that advance needed research on quality-of-life issues for people with ADRD and their caregivers, such as housing, and social and financial health.

Moving the Science of Inclusion Forward

Aging research that reflects the heterogeneity of older people will support increased longevity for greater numbers of Americans and decrease persistent health inequities among many social groups. The Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research and its community-facing approach is an important example of a best practice for community participation (Perry et al., 2024). Based on community feedback, the use of community advisory boards in research supports trust building, lifelong learning, skills development, and individual and community empowerment.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Incentivize community-based, participatory research methods as a means of more accurately understanding and measuring community challenges and resilience, which can, in turn, inform new or updated policy options.
- ✓ Consistent involvement of community supports key values, including researcher transparency and accountability, thereby establishing trust with historically neglected populations. Create and support mentorship and training opportunities for scientists at all career levels.

Policy Support for Employed Family Caregivers, Including AgeTech

Recent estimates suggest that as many as 32 million people in the United States are both employed and caring for ill or disabled family members (Miles & Wang, 2024), leading to delays in progress toward other life goals, including education, career, home ownership, or retirement saving, often with little support for care decisions or assistance with complex access to home and community-based services (HCBS). AgeTech (digital technology built around the needs of older people) holds promise for reducing caregiver burden. The NIA-funded network of artificial intelligence (AI) and tech centers working to accelerate AgeTech research and development focuses on older people and caregiver needs with technologies that enhance smartphone and wearable sensing capabilities.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Given that time is “the most important” caregiver resource and navigating HCBS eligibility takes time and effort, states can simplify HCBS eligibility information and access and implement presumptive eligibility to decrease caregiver burden.
- ✓ Further study the impact of Hospital at Home (HaH) policies on family caregivers to determine the best way to gain the most benefit from HaH policies and programs while avoiding undue caregiver stress.
- ✓ Oversee tech development to ensure that older people are involved in the design and testing of emerging AgeTech
- ✓ Develop the infrastructure and standards for AgeTech “Facts Labels” (akin to Nutrition Labels) to maintain integrity, transparency, and accessibility of device risks and benefits.

Retirement Policy and Financial Security of Older People

In 1983, House Speaker Tip O’Neill described Social Security as “the third rail of American politics” (Austad, 2024) due to the intense public reaction to changes in Social Security policy. Austad raises intriguing questions about the interplay among increased longevity, healthy life expectancy, retirement age policy, and economic realities of an aging nation. Many more Americans are reaching age 65 as a result of demographic trends and longevity gains (at least until 2019, before COVID-related declines), although many of us reach this age in poor health. At the time of the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935, people aged 65 could expect to live 12.7 more years. Today, if we reach age 65, we can expect to live 19.7 more years.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Study the political and economic implications for more nuanced approaches to retirement policy, such as using healthy life expectancy (HALE) estimates that consider people are now living longer but in poorer health.
- ✓ Monitor and fund geroscientific and biomedical research on delaying or eliminating the consequences of aging, including with drugs and dietary supplements. Additionally, address the retirement policy and positive health implications of longer, more meaningful lives.

Wrap-Up Message: NIA-Funded Research Supports All of Us as We Age

Aging touches all aspects of human existence. Over its 50-year history, NIA-funded research has cast a wide and critical net over many of these factors, benefiting all of us as we age. Maintaining robust support for scientific inquiry is essential to keeping us productive and healthy as we experience the benefits of longevity.

National Academy on an Aging Society

As a nonpartisan public policy institute, the Academy actively conducts and compiles research on issues related to population aging and provides information to the public, the press, policymakers, and the academic community.

Gerontological Society of America (GSA)

GSA is dedicated to promoting interdisciplinary aging research and education to drive innovations in policy and practice. As a professional society, GSA envisions a world where meaningful lives are achievable for all as we age.