



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 explores the dramatically shifting national and international landscape related to aging, disability, and mental health policies.

AGING, DISABILITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

Policy Implications of Older Person Mental Health Interventions

There are unique challenges in addressing mental health–related conditions in older people, including loss of function, that intertwine with common psychosocial stressors of later life transitions (e.g., retirement, widowhood) (Li, 2025, p. 53). Randomized controlled trials (RCT) of mental health interventions in the three mental health pathways—material, psychosocial, and behavioral—demonstrate varying effectiveness over the short and medium term and some could form the basis for policy action to generate longer term benefit. For example, “volunteering interventions only reduce loneliness in the short term,” but because older people who keep volunteering are less lonely, policies that support social engagement in late life “may yield mental health benefits” (Li, 2025).

Policy Actions

- ✓ Fund RCTs on the material pathways of mental health (e.g., income, wealth, status) leveraging early findings that income supplements generate improved physical and cognitive health. Relatedly, reform Social Security to strengthen guaranteed income.
- ✓ Involve health professionals in supporting older patients to adopt lifestyle modifications that benefit mental health and offer “free routine health checkups...[to] enhance health awareness and self-care” (Li, 2025).
- ✓ Consider supporting mental health interventions focused on “existing significant relationships such as family” (Li, 2025). Despite challenges in the study of family relationships, the importance of family in later life social and care supports is well established.

Community-Level Social Connectedness Data

The effect of social disconnection on physical, emotional, and cognitive health has received widespread attention in recent years. Older people, young adults, and people with disabilities experience social isolation and loneliness at higher rates and, as a result, are at higher risk for premature all-cause mortality, anxiety and depression, heart disease, and stroke (Bibbins, 2025). Several social connectedness scales are available and could be used to collect community-level data, currently a gap in understanding social health. Local and regional data can inform state and local policy, programs, and initiatives to address social disconnection and to better understand population risks.

Policy Actions

- ✓ State and local governments can establish data collection protocols for public health or other entities, “with specific focus on programs supporting those most at risk” (Bibbins, 2025).

- ✓ Promote cross-sector collaboration (e.g., healthcare, housing, transportation, education) to focus on social health solutions that address root causes.
- ✓ The public health community can raise awareness of the importance of social health in an effort to reduce stigma and encourage connection.

Resource Networks Serving Older People With Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are living longer and the systems to support older people must accommodate the needs of this population—some of which are unique—along with their aging caregivers. Efforts have been made over the years to integrate age and disability resource networks, such as the Administration for Community Living’s Community of Practice (CoP) established in 2021, consisting of 17 states (Caldwell & Gladstone, 2025). State councils from the CoP have reached out to state and community organizations, IDD advocates, and family members and have developed work plans to achieve goals. As subject matter experts, the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University identified and shared a list of “emerging and promising practices” and activities bridging aging and disability resources, including (Caldwell & Gladstone, 2025):

- ✓ Developing online resources, tools, and events to support future planning for older people, people with IDD, and caregivers.
- ✓ Supporting person-centered planning: two states are adding questions to service coordination guides that prompt supported decision-making for future planning.
- ✓ Improving Aging and Disability Resource Centers to better serve people with IDD.

Care Model Innovation in the Americas: The Life Course Approach

Healthcare models in the Americas (scoping from Argentina to Canada) developed primarily in the second half of the 20th century overlook the health needs of older people. An innovative “life course” perspective that considers the likely trajectory of health over one’s life and “favor[s] a prospective outlook” (Gonzalez-Bautista et al., 2025), can better support person-centered healthcare that “*target[s] the population’s health needs, preferences, and values*” (Gonzalez-Bautista et al., citing Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2023, italics in original).

Policy Actions

- ✓ Encourage the design of integrated care models that adopt a life course approach and account for a diverse range of patient needs.
- ✓ Allocate public resources to support health professionals in adopting use of data, technology, and health innovations.

Wrap-Up Message:

We have the ideas, technology, and expertise to strengthen policy responses to an aging world. The challenge is to deepen commitment to leveraging existing resources, community partnerships, and historic successes even as dramatic political and policy shifts are underway around the world.

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.