



# National Alliance for Caregiving

*Celebrating 15 Years of Empowering Family Caregivers*

**Statement to Senate HELP Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging  
Gail Hunt, President and CEO, National Alliance on Caregiving**

*Older Americans Act Reauthorization Priorities*

September 9, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Bernie Sanders and Senator Rand Paul, as well as Chairman Tom Harkin and Senator Michael Enzi, for inviting us to speak about the Older Americans Act and our priorities for reauthorization.

I am Gail Hunt, President and CEO of the National Alliance for Caregiving. The National Alliance for Caregiving is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations focused on family caregiving, including grassroots organizations, professional associations, service organizations, disease-specific organizations, two government agencies, and corporations. The Alliance serves as a national resource, engaging in research, policy analysis, coalition building and other activities focused on improving the quality of life for families and care recipients across the lifespan.

The Older Americans Act provides crucial support and services to millions of older adults in this country, as well as to the family members and friends who provide informal care to older adults and those with disabilities. Specifically, Title III-E, or the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), has proven to be an invaluable resource providing much-needed information and assistance, counseling, training, respite and supplemental services to caregivers for over ten years. Accordingly, the Alliance's **key priorities for Older Americans Act reauthorization** lie with strengthening and securing this program:

- (1) **Caregiver Assessment.** We strongly recommend that the provision of caregiver assessment be added as an allowable service under the NFCSP. Caregiver assessments are critical in order to understand the caregiver and care receiver's situation, the pressures facing the caregiver and how he or she is coping with them, and then ultimately to identify those services and supports that can help caregivers stay physically and emotionally healthy, as well as provide training and education to help them become better caregivers. Any such caregiver assessment provision should require that assessments include referrals to appropriate services and follow-up, as well as data collection and reporting requirements to the Assistant Secretary on Aging. Being able to aggregate and analyze assessment data from eventually millions of caregiver assessments over the years would be invaluable for further understanding how to meet successfully the diverse needs of family caregivers. For legislative language establishing a voluntary caregiver assessment program within the NFCSP, I refer you to Senator Kohl's *Strengthening Services for America's Seniors Act*, a bill that the National Alliance for Caregiving strongly supports.
- (2) **Increase authorized funding levels.** In order to strengthen the National Family Caregiver Support Program, we recommend increasing its authorization to \$250 million a year. While we recognize the current pressure Congress is under to cut spending across the board, it is also important to note that the NFCSP has been woefully underfunded for years and that the authorized funding levels set in this OAA Reauthorization will serve as a funding guide for years to come. Furthermore, the

number of family caregivers in the U.S. continues to grow as the population ages and increasingly relies on family members and friends for care. For the NFCSP to achieve its goals of supporting and serving all qualified family caregivers, adequate funding is crucial.

- (3) **Clarify definition of qualified caregiver.** Currently, conflicting definitions of “family caregiver” within the OAA have effectively prevented some family caregivers from accessing NFCSP services, specifically older caregivers who are parents of adult children with disabilities. We recommend amending all relevant sections to clarify the definition of family caregiver to include that group of caregivers. Furthermore, we recommend clarifying the definition of family caregiver to be inclusive of all variety of family and care structures of all racial and ethnic communities and LGBT communities which include partners and families of choices, as well as spouses and biological families.

### *Why Supporting Family Caregivers is Crucial*

Family caregivers are the backbone of our long-term care system. There are 65.7 million family caregivers in the U.S., providing informal care valued at \$450 billion, according to AARP. Unfortunately, given the many demands of providing care, caregivers often experience adverse consequences on their health and well-being, including higher levels of stress, depression and chronic conditions.

Providing family caregivers with basic support services like those provided through the National Family Caregiver Support Program is a small price to pay to help them manage the demands of caregiving and stay in their caregiving role, which is ultimately providing us with billions of dollars worth of savings. Caregiver support services are shown to help reduce caregiver stress – making the caregiver healthier and keeping the care recipient at home longer, which provides saving to our health care system generally and to Medicare and Medicaid specifically. Furthermore, a 2005 survey of caregivers who received NFCSP services revealed that over half of those surveyed (54%) said that caregiver support services enabled the care recipient to live at home for a longer period of time, again providing savings for Medicare and Medicaid.

Yet caregiver support services have been underfunded for years and have failed to reach thousands who desperately need support. With the aging of the population, the growing number of people with chronic conditions and age-related illnesses like Alzheimer’s disease, and the resulting increase in family caregivers, I strongly urge you to seize this opportunity to strengthen Title III E of the Older Americans Act. Likewise, I urge you to support reauthorization of the Lifespan Respite Care Program, authorized under a new Title XXIX of the Public Health Service Act. This reauthorization provides added crucial support to family caregivers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to these important issues. We look forward to working with the staff and Members of the HELP Committee to make this happen.