

**House Appropriations Committee
Pennsylvania Department of Aging**

**Written Testimony of
Secretary Jason Kavulich
February 27, 2025**

Introduction

Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and members of the House Appropriations Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance and impact of Governor Shapiro's proposed Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget for the Department of Aging. Both the Department and the Administration's commitment to older Pennsylvanians and the administration of Aging Programs and Services are reflected in the proposed budget. The Department is requesting an increased investment of PA Lottery funding to support older adults, most of whom live on fixed incomes, so they can remain in their homes and communities, and age with the dignity and respect they deserve. This investment is needed to build and strengthen the infrastructure of services and supports the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) Network provides as we prepare to serve the rapidly growing older adult population in Pennsylvania.

Older Pennsylvanians bring value, depth of knowledge, and experience to our lives, our communities, and our Commonwealth. We value the richness that older adults bring to our communities. To support their needs as they age, the Department of Aging and Pennsylvania's 52 AAAs work to administer a network of services and supports for older adults in Pennsylvania through every aspect of daily living. Through this network of services, older adults can receive nutritious meals, access to transportation and innovative housing solutions, and support for caregivers. Older adults may also receive services at home through the OPTIONS Program, find the best Medicare plan for them through PA MEDI and access support services through the PA Link, the department's online resource-navigation system. The aging network also includes 455 senior community centers that help combat social isolation and loneliness as they welcome older adults to participate in meals, social activities, health and wellness programs and connections to supportive services.

Additionally, older Pennsylvanians receive support to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation as almost 40,000 reports of suspected elder abuse are investigated each year, while those living in long-term care facilities can receive advocacy and support through the Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

The Department has made significant improvements in its mission to protect older adults, including the first major overhaul and upgrade of the Department's monitoring system in decades. The new monitoring system will be a key component of the Department's commitment to continuous quality improvement of services delivered by the AAAs at the local level. It is also a key component of the Department's work toward greater public transparency.

Finally, the Department's PACE program provides life-sustaining medications to 200,000 older adults at low or no cost. We are here to serve all older Pennsylvanians, regardless of income, to help them navigate their challenges.

There are currently [more than 282,000 Pennsylvanians aged 65 and older living with Alzheimer's](#), and that number is expected to increase to 320,000 by 2025. There are over 465,000 caregivers providing 822 million hours of unpaid care, valued at more than \$13.6 billion.

In 2024, Governor Shapiro signed into law Act 111, establishing within the Department of Aging the first Alzheimer's, Dementia and Related Disorders (ADRD) Office in the Commonwealth's history, to support older Pennsylvanians living with the disease and their caregivers. In the coming weeks, Governor Shapiro will appoint members of the ADRD Advisory Committee to begin the work of reviewing and updating the ADRD State Plan, advocate for policy changes, and leverage additional resources to better respond to the unique and complex needs of those living with ADRD and the systems that support them.

Governor's Budget Proposal

The Department appreciates Governor Shapiro's recognition of the needs of a growing older population in Pennsylvania, and the Department supports the historic, thoughtful investments outlined in the proposed 2025-2026 Budget. I believe it is important to highlight a few specific elements and how they will benefit older adults throughout the Commonwealth.

Investing in the Aging Network

Governor Shapiro has proposed an additional \$20 million in PENNCARE funding to support AAAs in stabilizing the Aging Network workforce and delivery systems. These resources, disbursed throughout the state to the 52 AAAs, will help Pennsylvania meet the growing older adult population's increased need for services. This funding to the AAA network will provide the opportunity to attract providers and recruit and retain staff, utilize adult day services to their full potential, and prevent the further elimination of services. As Pennsylvania continues to face staff shortages in many sectors, this additional funding will enable AAAs to strengthen their workforce and service capacity in their local communities by ensuring older adults receive the appropriate level of care – through in-home supports that promote independence instead of other expensive long-term care options.

Strengthening the Department's Oversight Capabilities

The Department of Aging is a small department with growing oversight responsibilities for services delivered by local aging agencies for a rapidly growing older adult population. This proposed budget includes \$2 million to strengthen the Department's oversight of the AAAs and bolster the Department's ability to identify service gaps or areas where more technical assistance may be required, with the ultimate goal of improving AAA's accountability across all programs, including in the provision of older adult protective services.

Aging Our Way, PA

In May 2024, Pennsylvania launched a ten-year multi-sector plan for older adults – Aging Our Way, PA. That launch came after a year of intensive work following Governor Shapiro's signing of an executive order directing the Department of Aging to lead the project. Designed with the input of more than

20,000 Commonwealth residents and stakeholders, including legislative aging committee leadership, *Aging Our Way, PA* will help transform service delivery to create the age-friendly Commonwealth that all Pennsylvanians deserve now and in the future.

The process to create *Aging Our Way, PA* was highly collaborative and considered the entirety of state, county, local, and federal policies, programs, and private industry practices that directly or indirectly affect older adults. Our team and stakeholders examined many policies, programs, and needs related to health, transportation, housing, community living, workforce, nutrition, home and community-based services, and specific projects such as age-friendly communities.

Year One activities have focused on creating a more inclusive and accessible environment for older Pennsylvanians and building a system of support for older adults and caregivers that may reduce the need for more costly care. This includes coordinating and evaluating service access, disparities in language, and cultural barriers and ensuring that older adults are prepared for emergencies.

To further support caregivers, we are developing a statewide Caregiver Toolkit, to provide resources to all types of caregivers, including spouses, children, siblings, grandchildren, friends, neighbors, grandparents raising grandchildren, and professional caregivers. The toolkit will offer an array of person-centered support options, including personalized and tailored resource guides, practical solutions, and connections to organizations to improve outcomes for caregivers, care recipients, and families.

To continue the work of *Aging Our Way, PA*, Governor Shapiro has proposed a \$3 million investment for Year Two of [*Aging Our Way, PA*](#), to focus on modernizing and strengthening the PA Link. The PA Link serves as Pennsylvania's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) network, designed to streamline access to long-term services and supports. The PA Link facilitates collaboration among the AAAs, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and other community-based organizations to ensure seamless service delivery statewide.

We appreciate your support and dedication to Pennsylvania's more than 3.4 million older adults and the important investments proposed under the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget. These investments will support and enhance services for older Pennsylvanians in your district and across the Commonwealth.