



State of Illinois
Illinois Department on Aging

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON **AGING**

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Illinois Council on Aging (the Council or ICoA), an advisory body to the Illinois Department on Aging (the Department or IDoA), was established by the General Assembly on August 9, 1973 (20 ILCS 105/7.01). The Council is mandated to review and comment on reports prepared by IDoA to the Governor and General Assembly, to review and comment upon the Department’s State Plan and on all disbursements of public funds by the Department to private agencies.

The Council is also directed to consult with the Director regarding the operations of the Department, and to recommend to the Governor candidates for appointment as Director of IDoA. In addition, the Council is directed to submit to the General Assembly, the Governor and the IDoA Director, annual reports regarding programs, services and facilities provided to the aging population by state agencies.

The Council is comprised of 31 voting members which includes 23 appointed by the Governor as citizen members, at least 16 of whom should be at least age 60. Members should represent all geographic sections of Illinois and both political parties. The remaining members are appointed by the General Assembly and include two appointed by the President of the Senate, two appointed by the Senate Minority Leader, two appointed by the Speaker of the House, and two appointed by the House Minority Leader.

ICoA MEETINGS

The Council is directed to meet quarterly, or as often as the Council Chair deems necessary. In Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), Council meetings were held via Webex on the following dates:

- September 17, 2024
- December 5, 2024
- March 25, 2025
- June 25, 2025

STATE ORGANIZATIONS/STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

During FY25, the Council met with experts from the following entities to consult regarding programs and services available to older adults in Illinois:

211 Illinois

211 Illinois is the lead entity for 211 services in the State of Illinois. The entity designs, implements, coordinates, and supports a statewide 211 system; provides governance and oversight; and advocates for and funds 211 service enhancements and expansions.

AgeOptions

AgeOptions is the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) serving Suburban Cook County. It is one of 13 AAAs in Illinois and it has served older adults and their families since 1974. It is designated by IDoA to plan, coordinate, develop and support services in the 30 townships surrounding the city of Chicago.

Easterseals

Easterseals empowers people to live independent, full lives. It is a non-profit organization that provides services to individuals with disabilities, older adults, veterans, and their families. Easterseals offers a wide range of support, including employment, health, education, community, and transportation services. Easterseals operates through a network of 70 affiliates across the United States to provide services in local communities.

Illinois Department on Aging

The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) supports older adults to live independently in their own homes and communities. The Department recognizes the importance of programs and services that adapt to meet needs and ensure the quality of life for an age cohort that continues to increase in longevity. Working with AAAs, community-based service providers, older adults and their caregivers, the Department strives to improve the quality of life for current and future generations of older Illinoisans.

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging

The National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA) is a non-profit organization devoted to improving the quality of life for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) older adults through education and advocacy. NAPCA provides culturally competent programs and services, advocates for the dignity and well-being of AANHPI seniors, and works to address health disparities and access to services.

National Council on Aging

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) advocates for every person's right to age well. Working with thousands of national and local partners, NCOA provides resources, tools, best practices, and advocacy to ensure every person can age with health and financial security. Founded in 1950, NCOA is the oldest national organization focused on older adults.

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is a U.S. government agency that administers Social Security, a social insurance program providing benefits to eligible individuals. These benefits include retirement income, disability income, and survivor benefits. The SSA also issues Social Security numbers and manages the financial aspects of the program.

OLDER ADULT PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

ICoA communicated with various program areas and discussed efforts focused on helping older adults age in place and stay healthy and safe for as long as possible. In FY 25, ICoA reviewed the following services and initiatives:

Adult Protective Services

Adult Protective Services (APS) responds to reports of alleged abuse, neglect, and exploitation (ANE) of adults aged 60 and older and adults with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 59 who live in the community. In addition, the program responds to reports of self-neglect (SN) which refers to a condition that is the result of

an eligible adult's inability to perform essential care tasks that substantially threaten his or her own health. Trained caseworkers in local agencies throughout Illinois conduct investigations and work with individuals to resolve abusive, neglectful, or exploitive situations and arrange for appropriate interventions.

Community Care Program

The Community Care Program (CCP) is a major initiative to prevent the unnecessary institutionalization of people in Illinois who are 60 years of age and older. The program is designed to meet the needs of older adults who have difficulty with household and personal care tasks. CCP services include in-home, adult day, emergency home response and automated medication dispenser.

Family/Unpaid Caregiver Support

Family caregiving is very common; according to AARP, in 2020, one in five Americans were caregivers. Many caregivers live with or near the person for whom they provide care, while others may be long-distance caregivers residing in another city or state. No matter their circumstances, a variety of resources are available to family caregivers through IDoA, Illinois' 13 AAAs, and numerous partner organizations.

Illinois Care Connections

The Illinois Care Connections (ICC) program provides technology and assistive devices to older adults living in the community, with the goal of enhancing their overall well-being and quality of life. To be eligible for this program, individuals must be 60 years of age or older and referred by an approved source, such as an AAA, AAA-funded entity, Care Coordination Unit (CCU), or Adult Day Service (ADS) provider. Referrals are received and processed by the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP), with whom IDoA partners to administer this program.

Multi-Sector Plan for Aging

Governor Pritzker issued Executive Order 2024-02 in August 2024 to begin the development process for a Multi-Sector Plan for Aging (MPA). The MPA is a 10-year blueprint to support healthy aging in Illinois communities, while also addressing issues related to healthcare, housing, transportation, and other social determinants of health.

Older Americans Act

Older Americans Act (OAA) funded programs serve older adults who reside in neighborhoods throughout Illinois. Available services fall into categories of access, in-home and community-based services, as well as nutrition, legal assistance, employment assistance and caregiver support. These services are coordinated through the AAAs and a network of community service providers.

Senior Community Service Employment Program

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community service and work-based job training program for older Americans. Authorized by the Older Americans Act (OAA), the program provides training for low-income, unemployed seniors. Participants must be at least 55, unemployed, and have a family income of no more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level.

Senior Health Insurance Program

The Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) provides objective counseling, advocacy, and enrollment assistance to Illinois' Medicare beneficiaries. SHIP counselors are certified to perform personal searches using the Medicare plan finder tool comparing Part D prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans to facilitate the best choices for individuals receiving benefits.

Social Security

Social Security is a federal program designed to protect workers and their families against lost income due to retirement/old age, disability, or death. It is administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA), which also manages Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and enrolls people into Medicare. Covered workers (and their employers) pay insurance premiums, in the form of payroll taxes, throughout their careers. Eligible workers can begin receiving Social Security retirements benefits after reaching age 62.

State Plan on Aging

State Units on Aging, including IDoA, are tasked under the Older Americans Act (OAA) with developing and administering a multi-year State Plan on Aging that provides goals and objectives related to assisting older residents, their families, and caregivers in their states. The State Plan serves as a framework for developing a comprehensive service system and outlines significant activities to best serve older adults and family caregivers in Illinois.

ICoA DISCUSSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Meetings with experts regarding programs and services furthered the mission of ICoA to promote the well-being of older adults in Illinois. The meetings provided opportunities to gather data, assess service gaps, provide recommendations, and share a common vision to best meet the needs of the older adult population. Highlights from the discussions in FY25 included the following:

IDoA staff updated ICoA on the development of the Fiscal Years (FY) 26-28 Illinois State Plan on Aging. The three initiatives that will be the basis of this State Plan are statewide visibility of the aging network, continuous quality assurance, and awareness and knowledge of caregiver needs. Additional considerations for the FY26-28 State Plan are Illinois' growing aging population, increasing diversity, current volunteer and workforce shortages resulting in limited resources, as well as the impact of ageism, ableism, racism, sexism and other stereotypes. Age-friendly communities will be encouraged and supported statewide. The Council discussed ways to address all these issues and others including isolation, long term care facilities, affordable housing, rural communities, transportation and healthcare. It was noted that incorporating meaningful actions into the State Plan will allow more older Illinoisians to age in their communities with independence, dignity, and quality of life.

Representatives from Easterseals and the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA) provided an overview of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). Both organizations serve as SCSEP grantees. SCSEP began in 1965 as a pilot program under the Johnson Administration. SCSEP was designed by Congress to support older job seekers through training and enhancing their employment skills. In 2016, SCSEP was reauthorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act (OAA). The SCSEP program is a federally funded

program falling under the United States Department of Labor (DOL). There are 19 national SCSEP grantee organizations. Funding is split between national organizations who receive 75 percent of the funding with the other 25 percent of the funding going to state organizations. To be eligible for SCSEP, individuals must be 55 or older, unemployed, reside in a county that the program serves, and meet the qualifying level of income. Job seekers train for an average of 20 hours per week to obtain skills, gain confidence and successfully become employed. Council discussion included the availability of training and outreach, as well as wages and the impact of benefits received on older adults participating in the program. ICoA was asked to reach out to their legislators regarding funding and share how crucial the SCSEP is to the older workforce and the impact it has on their lives.

IDoA staff shared that Governor Pritzker signed an executive order that creates a Multi-Sector Plan (MPA) for Aging. The MPA is a 10-year blueprint to support healthy aging in Illinois communities by addressing issues related to healthcare, housing, transportation, and other social determinants of health. IDoA is required to establish an Inter-Agency Task Force and a Community Advisory Council, as well as hire a MPA Chief. The first MPA Report is due to the Governor's Office by December 31, 2025. The report is to include a comprehensive strategic plan with measurable outcomes. An MPA implementation and Status Report is due to the Governor's Office by December 31, 2026. It was noted that there will be multiple opportunities for the Council to become engaged and provide input in the MPA development.

SHIP Director, Sandy Leith, updated ICoA on 2024 Medicare Open Enrollment that runs through October 15 and ends on December 7. Sandy reminded the Council that during Open Enrollment, beneficiaries may switch healthcare plans including Medicare Part D prescription coverage. Any changes to plans during this time will go into effect on January 1, 2025. She noted that starting in 2025 due to the Inflation Reduction Act, all Medicare plans will include a \$2,000 cap on what beneficiaries pay out-of-pocket for prescription drugs covered. If out-of-pocket spending on covered drugs reaches \$2,000, beneficiaries will not have to pay out-of-pocket for covered Part D drugs for the remainder of the calendar year. She shared that beneficiaries could seek assistance by calling 1-800 Medicare 24 hours a day, by logging online at <https://shiphelp.org>, or by calling the IDoA Senior Helpline at 1-800-252-8966. In addition, Sandy shared that she will be obtaining feedback from the SHIP counselors on the challenges as well as success of the upcoming enrollment period to share with stakeholders, including the ICoA membership. She encouraged ICoA members to contact her with questions or their own Medicare experiences to share.

Jack Myers, Social Security Administration (SSA) Public Affairs Specialist, spoke to the Council about recent SSA updates. He shared that the SSA website highlights many services at www.ssa.gov. He recommended to Council members that they create personal accounts to access the best information specific to them and their work histories, as well as to receive Social Security benefit verification letters and apply for or monitor benefits. He shared that SSA is now an appointment-based agency and that individuals can make appointments online for in-person meetings. Regarding the 2025 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA), he said it would be 2.5 percent starting January 1, 2025, as compared to 3.2 percent last year. Letters explaining this increase will be mailed out early in December but are available now online to individuals in their SSA accounts. Jack also shared information regarding Social Security scams and how to recognize and report a suspected scam. To report scams, use the website <https://oig.ssa.gov>. Individuals may also contact SSA by calling their toll-free number

1-800-772-1213. ICoA members asked several questions associated with accessing services and emphasized how valuable the Social Security system is to the well-being of the older adults and disabled populations in Illinois.

IDoA staff provided an overview of the Illinois Care Connections (ICC) program. It was shared that during the COVID-19 pandemic, a grant of \$1.7 million in Cares Act funding was given to IDoA, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) and Developmental Disabilities, and the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) to address social isolation. Funding was used to provide hotspots and tablets to older adults. While the federal funding and DHS partnership ended in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22), IDoA continued with \$2 million in state funding to provide hotspots and tablets to Community Care Program (CCP) participants. The program served 215 older adults in FY22 and 560 older adults in FY23. The program was expanded in FY24 to include assistive technology and limited durable medical equipment, as well as tablet bundles. New referral sources were added, and funding increased to \$2.5 million. In FY24, 1,728 older adults were served, and in FY25 to the date 2,147 referrals have been received. It was noted that ICC eligibility is not asset or income based but rather need based. A “need” is defined as a functional, cognitive, social, or psychological need that an older adult experiences that causes difficulties functioning at home or in the community or that causes them to be socially isolated. In addition to computer electronics, some examples of the equipment that ICC can provide are vision devices, hearing amplifiers, mobility devices, adaptive utensils, dressing and toileting devices, wheelchairs, shower chairs, and transfer devices. In addition, it was shared that a new grant is being written for FY26 and FY27 that will include funding for expanded outreach efforts. ICoA members expressed their continued support of the program.

Staff from the IDoA Division of Advocacy and Prevention Services shared that they recently received results from an evaluation of the APS program completed by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA). The evaluation identified program strengths and weaknesses. Through staff and network partner input, comparison to other state programs and compliance checks of acts, rules and procedures, the report will shape strategic planning for the Illinois APS program. In addition, it was shared that several new APS Advisory Committee Sub-Committees have been recently formed to get real time feedback from the field making sure that programs are working as intended and that there are no redundancies, inefficiencies, or gaps in services. Lastly, there was discussion regarding APS workforce retention efforts through a new federally funded APS Pathways Internship Program. The goal is to engage college interns and interest them in APS careers. During their internship, they will complete certification training, shadow caseworkers, and receive supervisor mentorship with the goal of a conditional job offer upon graduation from college. ICoA members expressed support to enhance the APS program and build opportunities to develop professionals.

Marci Phillips, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the National Council on Aging (NCoA), presented ICoA with NCoA policy priorities for 2025. NCoA’s mission is to improve the lives of older adults, especially those who are struggling. A goal has been set to positively impact the health and economic security of 40 million older adults by 2030. Focus areas are fall prevention, chronic disease, behavioral health, as well as economic well-being focused on benefits enrollment, job training and money management. NCoA priorities also include support for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), chronic disease self-management, fall prevention, senior center resources, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), direct care worker strategies, health promotion and disease prevention. In addition, NCOA is working on key legislation known as health extenders, to keep resources in place for Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers

Act (MIPPA) outreach and enrollment assistance, as well as access to telehealth services and Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services. Another focus is on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) for another five-year period to ensure continued funding for home delivered meals, congregate meals, health promotion, disease prevention, caregiver support, and a whole array of elder rights protections. Discussion followed and ICoA members asked how they could further NCoA’s mission and safeguard services for older adults. Members were encouraged to advocate and educate elected officials on the program needs of older adults in Illinois.

Edward Perry, Executive Director of 211 Illinois, provided an update on current expansion efforts of the 211 system in Illinois. He shared that 211 Illinois has been in existence for 15 years, starting with mostly volunteers leading up to today with executive leadership and grant funding to enable growth. 211’s mission is to connect residents to vital health and human services information and referral services nationwide. It is available 24 hours a day and can assist callers in more than 200 languages. 211 information can be obtained by simply dialing 211 from your phone, texting your zip code to 898211, or by using resources on the website at www.211illinois.org. 211 Illinois is the lead entity for 211 services throughout the State of Illinois and has been in existence since 2009 with the Illinois legislature passing the 211 Illinois Service Act in 2010. The 211 Illinois Service Act tasks 211 Illinois as the lead agency for 211 services in Illinois with government oversight over the design, implementation, and statewide coordination of the 211 system. 211 Illinois advocates for increased funding to allow for further expansion of the 211 system and to gather statewide data. Data shows that there was a 31 percent increase in contacts totaling 176,464 in 2024 from 2023; 23 percent increase in needs being identified totaling 189,907 in 2024 from 2023; and an increase of 20 percent in referrals totaling 304,415 in 2024 from 2023. In the last 18 months, 211 statewide coverage has increased from 91 percent to 97 percent, with 100 percent coverage expected later this year.

Diane Slezak, President and Chief Executive Officer of AgeOptions, shared information about *The Day of Advocacy* that was held on May 28, 2025, in 46 locations throughout Illinois to focus on the importance of the Older Americans Act (OAA). A campaign was initiated, *Don’t Blow Out the Candles on the Older Americans Act*, to advocate for the retention and full federal funding of OAA which turns 60 this year. The Act has allowed the United States to develop an intertwined nationwide aging network and provides funding for invaluable services that older adults need to stay in their homes as they age. The Act established by legislation on July 14, 1965, created the Administration on Aging (AoA), the State Units on Aging (SUA), as well as the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Discussion focused on OAA funding as the financial backbone of aging services in Illinois and ICoA members were encouraged to reach out to their legislators for its continued support.

ICoA Membership *(As of 6/30/2024)*

Community Members

Sue Vega, **Chair**
Kim Hunt, **Vice Chair**
Julie Bobitt, Ph.D., **Secretary**
Britta M. Larson, **Nominating Chair**
Anthany Frazier
Rev. Melvin L. Grimes
Paulette M. Hamlin
Christina Hardin-Weiss
Talat Khan, Ph.D.
Susan Lawler
Sylvia Mahle
Patricia Marton, Ph.D.
Mubarak A. Mirjat, DPT
Phyllis Mitzen
Crystal Odom-McKinney
Edgar Ramirez
Kate A. Schwartz
Meijan Linda Yu, Ph.D.

Legislative Members

Senate

Senator Laura Fine (D), 9th District
Senator Mattie Hunter (D), 3rd District
Senator Dave Syverson (R), 35th District

House

Representative Maura Hirschauer, (D), 49th District
Representative Rita Mayfield, (D), 60th District



State of Illinois, Department on Aging

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ilaging.illinois.gov

Senior HelpLine (8:30am – 5:00pm, Monday – Friday):

1-800-252-8966; 711 (TRS)

Adult Protective Services Hotline (24-Hour):

1-866-800-1409

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate against any individual because of his or her race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, order of protection status, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, or unfavorable discharge from military service in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities.

If you feel you have been discriminated against, you have a right to file a complaint with the Illinois Department on Aging.

For information call the Senior HelpLine: 1-800-252-8966; 711 (TRS).