



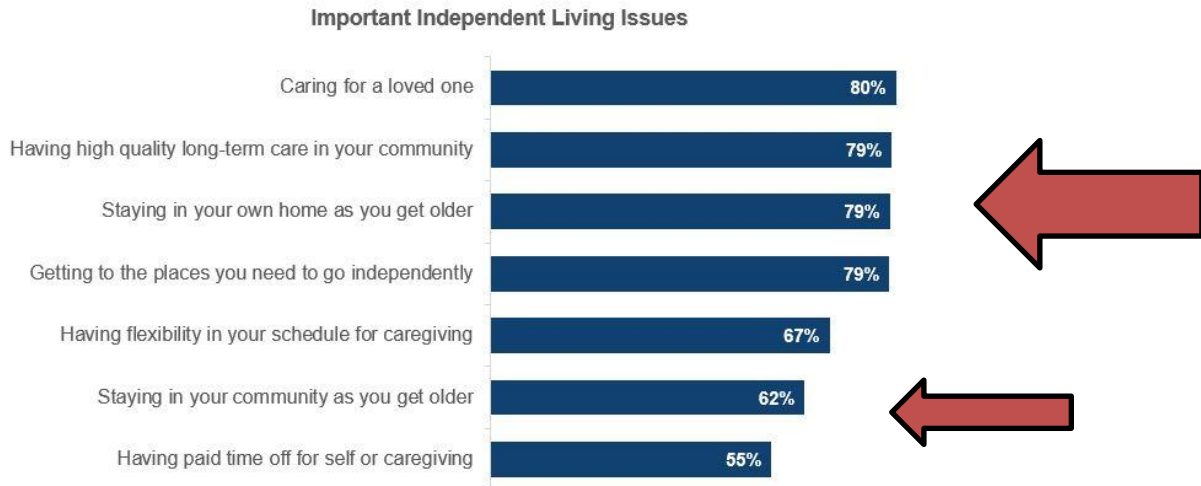
Senate Appropriations Committee
IN SUPPORT – HB 2012 – DHS Budget – Aging Services
January 25, 2023
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Chairman Dever and members of the Senate Appropriations Human Resources Division Committee, I am Josh Askvig, State Director at AARP North Dakota.

AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization with more than 84,000 members in North Dakota. Our mission is to empower people to choose how they live as they age.

We appreciate this committee's work to dig into issue important to older North Dakotans and this need will continue to grow. Today our population age 50+ is almost 256,000 and 50% of those households are age 65 or older. Today in North Dakota over 9 counties have a mean age of over 50 and a number of others are right on their heels.

Below is a chart from our 2020 North Dakota Vital Voices Survey, a state specific survey of issues that impact North Dakotan's 45+ conducted every three years. In our survey two years ago, 79% indicated that staying in their own home as they got older, getting to the places they need to go and having access to quality long term care in their community was extremely or very important. Also, 62% said staying in their community as they got older was extremely or very important. It was no surprise to us and I am sure it doesn't surprise you.



11. For the following list of issues, please indicate how important each is to you personally. (Percent 'extremely important' or 'very important') (n=722)

As noted in the overview from the Aging Services Division earlier in the session, the demand for in-home services has continued to increase and participants living in home and community-based settings have complex medical and behavioral health needs. This increase in demand for HCBS has caused an increase demand on the time for case managers to work with their HCBS clients – increased case management caseload from 105-117 clients in less than two years, while also managing new referrals- at least 160 new cases every month.

The Governor’s budget includes 13 additional FTEs- which we support- and will help the Department manage this increase in demand for services including:

- 10 HCBS case managers
- 2 new service navigators for provider referral searching
- 1 generalist to promote senior education

Attached you will find the *North Dakota: 2020 Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) State Scorecard*. This is the 4th time the Commonwealth Fund, The Scan Foundation and AARP have teamed up to provide a state LTSS assessment with apples to apples comparisons. If you look at the card you will see North Dakota made substantial improvement in 7 of the 21 indicators. And two of those were in the area of Choice of Setting and Provider dimension. In fact, North Dakota was recognized nationally during the roll out of the 2020 Scorecard for the work it has done to make improvements.

But let’s be clear, while we have done good work, we still have plenty of work to do. Specifically, look at the indicators on the back related to Nursing Home Cost, Medicaid LTSS

Balance: Spending and Medicaid LTSS Balance: Users, and Successful Discharge to Community where we continue to rank low. Again, for AARP and the thousands of North Dakotans we represent, it's about choice. Older North Dakotans deserve to know they have options for care as they age. Overwhelmingly they prefer to stay in their homes and communities and the budget should continue the state moving in a direction that prioritizes Home and Community Based care.

In order to continue to support HCBS, investments need to be made to provide assistance to caregivers and HCBS recipients including increase in daily rates for adult foster care and family home care, bed hold days for residential rehab and community supports, adding companionship to SPED and EX-SPED, and increasing the guardianship establishment funds.

Finally, as noted in the budget overview, in the last two years the cost and ways meals are delivered to seniors has changed. The meals programs funded through the Aging and Adults services budget are a critical lifeline for older adults. They promote good health and as evidenced during the pandemic a critical component to keeping individuals at home and in their communities. Increasing the senior meal rate will allow reimbursement for two meals vs. one will help decrease the instances of malnourishment that leads to hospitalization and increased LTC needs. It should also be noted that meals programs also help to combat isolation and loneliness.

Combine these factors with the idea that it appears many of these senior providers will be losing some additional federal supports they received during the pandemic and knowing they have seen a significant shift in their costs as they have moved to almost exclusively pick up or to go meals, and there is a need for a funding increase. We would encourage you to increase the meals funding to ensure that this critical service can meet the needs.

Again, we appreciate the time to raise issues important to North Dakotans 50+ and would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.