

THE ADVOCATE

January 2012

2011—The Year in Review

The Area Agency on Aging 1-B enhances the lives of older adults and adults with disabilities in the communities we serve.



Advocates for older adults enjoyed advocacy success in 2011 as the state ended years of cuts to aging programs, the expansion of state pension taxation spared current seniors, and elder abuse bills were passed by the state Senate. The AAA 1-B responded to Governor Snyder's call for measuring the outcomes of state-funded programs and engaged in advocacy efforts using facts and evidence which prove value for the money invested in critical aging programs.

The 2010 U.S. Census revealed an expected growth in the senior population. Michigan's population of adults age 60 and over grew 21% from 2000 to 1,930,341 individuals, and was buffeted by efforts to have Michigan snowbirds properly counted as Michigan residents. Region 1-B's older adult population growth of 30.4% outpaced Michigan's growth. The Census reports over 546,000 adults age 60 and over live in Region 1-B, which represents 28.3% of the state's older adult population.

In Lansing

- Despite the threat of a 32% cut to aging programs, the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) was essentially flat-funded for FY 2012. The OSA had seen \$10 million, 28%, in state funding cuts over the past three years.
- *MI Choice* was funded at \$230 million, with the increase of \$26 million from FY 2011 directed to nursing facility transitions. Additional funding to reduce *MI Choice* waiting lists was not approved. There are currently 1,421 individuals on the *MI Choice* wait list in Region 1-B.
- State tax reform brings good news and bad news for seniors in 2012. The special personal exemption for adults age 65 and over, worth about \$100 in individual tax savings, was eliminated. Public and private pension income of individuals under the age of 67 will now be subject to state tax, with certain exemptions given to individuals who are currently age 60-66. Pensions for seniors age 67 and over will retain the current tax treatment. The senior preference for receiving the homestead property tax credit will end in 2012.
- The Senate passed a bi-partisan package of eighteen elder abuse bills with near-unanimous support. The bills have been sent to the House for consideration in early 2012.
- AAA 1-B staff, Advisory Council, and Consumer Advisory Team responded to the state's plan to integrate the care of Medicare/Medicaid dually-eligible individuals. Input has been given in public forums, meetings with legislators, written correspondence, and through participation in stakeholder workgroups. The Advisory Council completed a study of the impact of integrated care and presented its findings to state officials. The study may be viewed on the AAA 1-B website at <http://www.aaa1b.com/news-events/publications/reports/>.

In Washington D.C.

- Congress passed a FY 2012 budget and most Older Americans Act programs were funded at 2011 levels. Programs that saw funding cuts are: LIHEAP for low-income heating assistance; HUD Section 202 Housing for the Elderly, and Alzheimer's Support Services, which enables AAA 1-B to offer caregiver training.
- Congress voted to cap discretionary spending for the next ten years. Funding for aging services has been stagnant or cut in recent years, and the cap withholds relief despite growth in the older adult population and increased demand for services.
- Congress did not agree on a plan to reduce the nation's debt by \$1.2 trillion over ten years so automatic cuts to discretionary programs may begin in 2013. Programs at risk include Older Americans Act, Senior Corps, Section 202 Housing, and Community Development Block Grants.
- A draft of Older Americans Act reauthorization legislation was released, which calls for a 50% increase in funding for Nutrition, Supportive Services, and Health Promotion. Missing from the bill: allowing states or AAAs to determine the appropriate ratio of home delivered and congregate meals, based on local needs and preferences.
- AAA 1-B, working with Senator Levin and Representative Peters, was able to extend the life of a HUD waiver that helps *MI Choice* participants afford to live in certain assisted living facilities.
- Certain health care reform provisions took effect: lengthening of the Medicare open enrollment period, elimination of deductions and co-pays for many preventative services, free annual checkups for seniors, a 50% discount on brand name drugs for Part D beneficiaries who are in the "donut hole", and a 7% discount on generic drugs.
- The CLASS program, a proposed voluntary government administered long-term care insurance program, was terminated before implementation because officials could not assure its fiscal solvency and sustainability.

Strengthening Our Advocacy Together

- AAA 1-B staff and Advisory Council made 705 contacts to state and federal legislators, including 206 personal visits. The Agency's five representatives on the Michigan Senior Advocates Council made numerous visits to legislators as well.
- Eleven testimonies were presented at state and local hearings.
- Results of the Agency's study, *The Value and Outcomes for Michigan's Home Delivered Meals for the Elderly Program* were used successfully to advocate against nutrition services funding cuts.
- The Senior Advocacy Network (SAN) grew by 53 members in 2011 to 491. The SAN hosted *Making Sense of Michigan's Budget* with guest presenter, State Representative Rick Olson.
- Older Michiganians Day 2011: Over 140 advocates from Region 1-B met individually and in small groups with 40 of its 43 state legislators. The 2011 statewide attendance of 750 increased 25% over last year.
- AAA 1-B released its first Advocacy Platform for 2011—2012.

Looking Ahead to 2012

Passage of Elder Abuse bills

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*Personal Property Tax Reform:
Millions of dollars in local senior
millage monies are at risk*

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*Health Care Reform:
Will Congress agree on how to
reduce the growth of health care
spending? How will their
decisions impact seniors?*

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*Integrated Care for Michigan's
Dual Eligibles: Advocating for a
plan that works for all
stakeholders*



The Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) is a nonprofit agency serving the needs of older adults in Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Washtenaw counties. Contact Ann Langford at (248) 262-1282 or by e-mail at alangford@aaa1b.com to join the Senior Advocacy Network or receive copies of AAA 1-B reports referenced in *The Advocate*.