

August 15, 2022



The Honorable Ann Kuster
The United States House of Representatives
320 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bryan Steil
The United States House of Representatives
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kuster and Steil,

On behalf of LeadingAge, a national organization representing more than 5,000 nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-minded organizations that touch millions of lives every day, thank you for your leadership in establishing the 21st Century Long-Term Care Caucus. The Caucus is uniquely positioned to lead Congress in addressing challenges across the long-term care continuum, and I can assure you your leadership is needed now more than ever.

Long term care in this country is at a crisis point. The fundamental promise a generation ago to America's older adults was that they would have complete health care coverage in their older years, through Medicare and, as needed, Medicaid. But long-term care was left off the table in the final creation of those programs. With Americans now living well into their 80s and older, it is time to finish the job and keep the promise. Long-term care should not be a luxury item for the wealthiest Americans who can afford to pay for it out of pocket and the lowest income who, depending on their state's Medicaid program, may be able to have their long-term care covered under Medicaid. This Caucus can and should lead in proposing bold, bipartisan solutions that will help millions of older adults, their families, and those who care and work with them.

In addition to the longstanding and increasingly urgent need for a new approach to financing, we can all agree that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already challenging staffing crisis in aging services. Even though we are entering a new and different phase of the pandemic, the aging services workforce situation is not improving. In fact, aging services professionals are struggling to recruit workers, and workers are being drawn away by competitive wages and flexible hours in other sectors. The population of the United States is rapidly aging; by 2034 there will be more people over age 65 than under 18. Unfortunately, many who will need professional aging services at some point in their lives will be unable to obtain care.

In order to have an equitable and functional long-term care system, older adults need affordable places to call home. Having an affordable place to live is a crucial first step to being able to receive services and care in the home and community. There is a severe shortage of affordable housing for older adults with low incomes. Between 2009 and 2019, the number of very low-income older adult households spending more than half of their incomes on rent increased by an astonishing 68%. The number of older adults who receive federal housing assistance must expand well beyond the 2.5 million older adults who currently benefit from housing assistance. Expanding the supply of affordable, service-connected housing allows older adults to live independently in community and avoid much more expensive and restrictive settings. Any expansion will immediately help erase and

shorten current waiting lists of two to five (or more) years and help the nation prepare for the projected 13.8 million new older adult households between 2020 and 2040.

LeadingAge proposes that the Caucus lead on proposals that would alleviate the strain on our long-term care system.

Enact long term care financing reform

- We propose that as Caucus co-chairs, you lead on and champion the *Well-Being Insurance for Seniors to be at Home (WISH) Act* (H.R. 4289). This bill would transform elder care by creating a federal long-term care insurance program. It would create a public-private partnership that would pay for catastrophic long-term care insurance and enable families to generate funding for coverage.

Ensure Medicare and Medicaid adequately cover the costs of care

- Enact permanent Medicaid payment changes across long term care settings including providing for a direct pass-throughs for workers, and a requirement for states to update Medicaid rates regularly.
- Instruct the Administration to design and implement a methodology for calculating a living wage and incorporate it into Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement formulas. The importance of a living wage is highlighted the LeadingAge LTSS Center's [*Making Care Work Pay*](#).

Ensure an adequate workforce

Even if we achieved transformative change on the financing of long-term care, we need people to care for our older adults. This means developing both domestic and international pipelines of workers as well as making jobs serving older adults respected, well paid with good benefits, and sustainable.

- Implement a new temporary guest worker H-2 Visa Program, for aging services and disabled, as recommended in our draft bill, the *Ensuring Caregivers for the Aged and Disabled Act*. While we encourage the Caucus to work on policies that would create a sustainable domestic pipeline, there is a crisis now and immigration is going to be a large part of ensuring we can care for the older adults who are currently and imminently in need of services.
- Spearhead appropriations requests to fund a new program and/or add to existing programs that will create a pipeline of aging services workers starting with high school students. We have members who are engaging in this type of training, but we need a national approach in order to create a true pipeline of workers.
- Look at options for supporting employers in offering wraparound benefits to aging services through grants that provide funding for recruitment and retention, and ensuring the funds are to be used for wage subsidies, tuition assistance, childcare, and transportation assistance.

Expand the supply of affordable housing for older adults

In any bill to significantly expand affordable housing resources, include:

- \$2.5 billion for approximately 26,000 new Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly homes.

- \$15 billion for 260,000 new Project-Based Rental Assistance homes.
- Funding for Service Coordinators across the affordable senior housing portfolio (HUD, Rural Housing Service, Low Income Housing Tax Credit, etc.).

Again, we wholeheartedly commend you for establishing the 21st Century Long-Term Care Caucus. We welcome your boldness in assembling a solutions-focused coalition of members working to put partisan politics aside to deliver real solutions for our nation's older adults who need long-term care services and the providers who serve them. Financing, workforce, and housing are all key components of maintaining and promoting high quality of life and of care for our older adult population. We will continue to actively encourage all of our members to ask their Members of Congress to join the Caucus. LeadingAge and our provider members stand ready to help the Caucus. We look forward to working in close partnership on the issues addressed in this letter and others as the Caucus establishes its agenda.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Smith-Sloan
President and CEO