

The Invisible Americans: Older Adults Are Missing from Media Coverage and Congressional Statements Around Reconciliation

As Congress considers Build Back Better, an analysis of media coverage and Congressional communication shows remarkably few mentions of older adults. Measures needed to help older Americans may be on the chopping block because of their invisibility in public conversations.

The data show* that from March 31-December 4, older Americans have been:



Invisible in Media Coverage

Only **6.05%** of media coverage of Build Back Better has included a reference to older Americans—even though the proposal includes historic new investments to help meet older adults' needs.

1.39%



Invisible in Congressional Press Releases

Only 314 out of 22,443 or **1.39%** of press releases from Congress included older Americans in the context of Build Back Better.



Invisible in Congressional Tweets

Out of 324,643 tweets from Members of Congress, only 289 or **0.09%** included older Americans in the context of Build Back Better.

The Deadly Cost of Invisibility

More than 60% of nonprofit aging services providers say they are turning people away from home care, adult day care and nursing home care, including 25% who've had to close units or buildings.

Cutting aging services support would be catastrophic for millions of Americans:



NO roof over their heads



NO meal prep



NO help taking medicines



NO help bathing

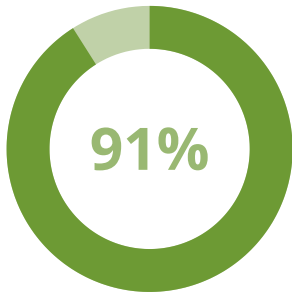


NO transport to
medical appointments

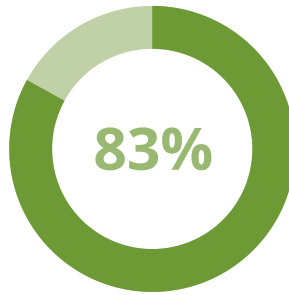
Americans Support Investments in Older Adults

Treating older adults as invisible makes no sense. Americans across the political spectrum support investments in care and services for 54 million older Americans and their families.

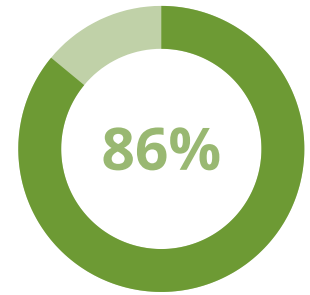
- 89% of Americans support increased investment in **affordable home care services**.
- 86% support increased investment in **housing and support for low-income older adults**.



Say older Americans should have the **support and resources** they need to lead a fulfilling life



Say **elected officials have failed older adults and the people who care for them** by ignoring and underfunding America's aging services for decades



Say the government must make a **bigger investment in services and care** for older adults

Opinion Research Source: 3W Insights survey commissioned by LeadingAge, June 15-20, 2021.

We Cannot Repeat the Failures of the COVID Pandemic

When older Americans were treated as invisible during COVID, the effects were catastrophic. The media and Congress cannot let them be invisible again.

The New York Times 14 Lessons for the Next Pandemic

March 15, 2021

Don't Be Ageist

*The most important lesson: **This is what happens when we treat older people as expendable.** There's **definitely an element of ageism at work** here, which really crept into how the country made decisions and promulgated policies.*

*From the outset of the pandemic, we knew older adults and those with underlying health conditions were most at risk, and yet **we chose to ignore** the fact.*

—Katie Smith Sloan

***Analysis Methodology:** The data and analysis of media coverage and Congressional statements were produced using free, open-source research tools.

- Media stats were produced using MediaCloud.org's Explorer feature.
- Press release data for Members of Congress comes from ProPublica's database available at <https://projects.propublica.org/represent/statements/search>.
- Congressional social media was collected from Twitter using the list of Member social media accounts available at <https://theunitedstates.io/>.
- Congressional Record information was produced by aggregating relevant results from searches on <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/search>.

The analysis focused on articles and public documents that appeared beginning March 31, 2021 (when the American Jobs Plan was announced) through December 4, 2021, and which included key legislative and program descriptors ("build back better," "reconciliation," "infrastructure," "American Jobs Plan," "American Families Plan," "affordable housing," "home care," "community-based services," or "home and community based services") in conjunction with commonly used terms like "seniors," "senior citizens," "older adults," "older Americans," "elder care," or "elderly."