

May 4, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Murray, and Ranking Member Blunt:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) is a national non-profit organization comprised of nearly 6,000 geriatrics healthcare professionals and basic and clinical researchers dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of older Americans. The AGS believes in a just society – one where we all are supported by and able to contribute to communities and where ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of bias and discrimination no longer impact healthcare access, quality, and outcomes for older adults and their caregivers. We advocate for policies and programs that support the health, independence, and quality of life of all of us as we age and urge you to support at least **\$82 million in FY 2023 for the geriatrics education and training programs under Title VII of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act.**

The AGS appreciates your ongoing support of the Title VII Geriatrics Health Professions Programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the increases appropriated in FY 2022. The Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Programs (GWEPs) and recipients of the Geriatrics Academic Career Awards (GACAs) have been successfully leading and preparing the healthcare workforce, caregivers, and their communities and most recently on the frontline throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency, including working with health systems to participate in the outreach to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, preventing widening the health disparity gap exacerbated by the pandemic. These programs are critical in providing assistance for proactive public health planning with their geriatrics expertise and knowledge of long-term care and would help ensure states and local governments have improved plans for older adults in disaster preparedness for future pandemics and natural disasters. Furthermore, as the U.S. population rapidly ages, access to a well-trained workforce and appropriate care for medically complex older adults is imperative to maintaining the health and quality of life for this growing segment of the nation's population.

Our healthcare workforce receives little, if any, training in geriatric principles,¹ which leaves us ill-prepared to care for older Americans as health needs evolve. With our nation continuing to face a severe shortage of geriatrics healthcare providers and academics with the expertise to train these providers, the AGS believes it is

¹ Only 3 percent of medical students take even one class in geriatric medicine and fewer than 1 percent of RNs, pharmacists, physician assistances and physical therapists are certified in geriatrics or gerontology. Yet estimates are that by 2030, 3.5 million additional health care professionals and direct-care workers will be needed to care for older adults. 2018 Issue Brief, Eldercare Workforce Alliance, available at: https://eldercareworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GWEP_OnePager_v2.pdf

urgent that we increase the number of educational and training opportunities in geriatrics and gerontology. The requested increase in funding over FY 2022 levels would help ensure that HRSA receives the funding necessary to expand these critically important programs commensurate with the increasing need. The additional funding will also allow HRSA to expand the number of GWEPs and GACA recipients and move toward closing the current geographic and demographic gaps in geriatrics workforce training. Given the increasing diversity among older people² and rapid growth of the older population,³ the need for a diverse workforce as well as training in geriatrics and gerontology will continue to increase. The only federal programs that focus on training the workforce to care for older Americans must keep pace with that growth.

Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Programs. The GWEP is currently the only federal program designed to increase the number of providers in a variety of disciplines with the skills and training to care for older adults. The GWEPs educate and engage the broader frontline workforce, including the caregiving workforce and family caregivers, and focus on opportunities to improve the quality of care delivered to older adults, particularly in underserved and rural areas. In Academic Year 2020-2021, nearly 52 percent of the health care delivery sites that GWEP awardees partnered with were located in medically underserved communities.⁴ The GWEP was launched in 2015 by HRSA with 44 three-year grants provided to awardees in 29 states. In 2019, HRSA funded a second cohort of 48 GWEPs across 35 states and two territories (Guam and Puerto Rico) and provided extension grants to 15 former GWEP awardees. Due to GWEPs' partnerships with primary care and community-based organizations, GWEPs are uniquely positioned to rapidly address the needs of older adults and their caregivers. **Additional funding would allow 80 GWEPs at \$950,000 per program, enabling every state to have a GWEP and ensure that more rural and underserved areas of the country can have access to geriatrics training and expertise.**

Geriatrics Academic Career Awards. The GACA program is an essential complement to the GWEP. GACAs ensure we can equip early-career clinician educators to become leaders in geriatrics education and research. It is the only federal program designed to increase the number of faculty with geriatrics expertise in a variety of disciplines, providing training in opioid use treatment, health equity/social determinants of health, and more. The program was eliminated in 2015 through a consolidation of several training programs. However, the program was reestablished in November 2018 when HRSA released a funding opportunity indicating their intention to fund 26 GACAs for four years starting September 1, 2019. Since 1998, original GACA recipients have trained as many as 65,000 colleagues in geriatrics expertise and have contributed to geriatrics education, research, and leadership across the U.S. **Additional funding would allow 60 GACAs at \$100,000 per award, ensuring we have a larger and more geographically diverse pipeline of geriatrics research and training expertise with the incentives and resources needed to grow the field.**

² Matthews KA, Xu W, Gaglioti AH, et al. Racial and Ethnic Estimates of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in the United States (2015-2060) in Adults Aged ≥ 65 Years. *Alzheimers Dement*. 2019;15(1):17-24. [doi:10.1016/j.jalz.2018.06.3063](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jalz.2018.06.3063)

³ U.S. Census Bureau. An Aging Nation: Projected Number of Children and Older Adults. Updated October 8, 2019. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/historic-first.html>.

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services. Fiscal Year 2023 Health Resources and Services Administration Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees. Published March 2022. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2023.pdf>.

Thank you for your consideration of this funding request. If you have comments or questions about HRSA funding or other issues related to the healthy aging of older Americans, please contact Anna Kim, Senior Manager, Public Affairs & Advocacy, at 212-308-1414 or akim@americangeriatrics.org.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Peter Hollmann MD in black ink.

Peter Hollmann, MD
President

Handwritten signature of Nancy E. Lundebjerg in black ink.

Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

May 4, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Educations

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, and Ranking Member Cole:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) is a national non-profit organization comprised of nearly 6,000 geriatrics healthcare professionals and basic and clinical researchers dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of older Americans. The AGS believes in a just society – one where we all are supported by and able to contribute to communities and where ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of bias and discrimination no longer impact healthcare access, quality, and outcomes for older adults and their caregivers. We advocate for policies and programs that support the health, independence, and quality of life of all of us as we age and urge you to support at least **\$82 million in FY 2023 for the geriatrics education and training programs under Title VII of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act.**

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Peter Hollmann, MD
President

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Chief Executive Officer