

Association on Aging in New York

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State Budget Brings Positive News for Seniors Waiting for Services

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(Albany, NY 4/1/14) The passage of the state Budget brings welcome news to the aging network - an additional \$5 million for the Community Services for the Elderly (CSE) program, as well as \$980,000 for a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for several programs that help elders maintain their independence. Aging groups joined together to request an additional \$26 million in this year's state budget for the CSE program in an effort to eliminate waiting lists for services at local offices for the aging and community-based agencies. The additional CSE funding has arrived at a critical time and will help offices for the aging throughout the state provide much-needed services and begin to chip away at the 7,000 currently on waiting lists for services.

This year four aging organizations -- the Association on Aging in NY (Aging-NY), Council of Senior Centers and Services (CSCS), Lifespan, and NYS Coalition for the Aging (NYSCA) -- worked together to educate the Legislature on the value of providing additional funding to help offices for the aging and community agencies provide long term supports and services to aging New Yorkers so they can remain independent.

"The \$5 million will reduce the waiting list by about 20 percent," according to Laura Cameron, Executive Director of the Association on Aging in NY. "These additional funds will bring services to almost 1,400 older New Yorkers who have been waiting to receive services such as transportation to medical appointments, in-home personal care, nutritious meals and social model adult day services," she said. "The flexibility of CSE enables local offices for the aging and community agencies to address high-priority needs within their communities."

The 59 local offices for the aging in New York vary in size and geographic scope, but one thing remains constant – their mission to support caregivers and help seniors remain at home and in the community with friends and family. The flexible nature of CSE means that it can be used locally to add high priority services and begin to address waiting lists. Offices for the aging are poised to use these additional funds immediately, in ways that are just as unique as the individuals they serve.

"New York State's investment in Community Services for the Elderly will empower the aging network in Erie County to respond to the very diverse needs of older adults," said Randy Hoak, Commissioner of the Erie County Department of Senior Services. "As one of the largest upstate Area Agencies on Aging,

we often face the challenge of serving those in dense urban areas, sprawling suburbs, and the far reaches of rural communities. We are tasked with overcoming language barriers, as well as transportation barriers. We have wait lists due to funding, and wait lists due to lack of service providers. Increased CSE funding will allow us to buy or build the services needed in the communities we serve, and most importantly meet the needs of the aging population with the goal of keeping older adults in their homes and community."

Mary Ann Spanos, Ph.D., Director of the Chautauqua County Office for the Aging, also in western New York, tells a similar story. "Personal care assistance is essential for allowing our oldest residents to remain independent at home with the dignity they deserve," she said. "The additional CSE funding in the budget will help us provide in-home assistance to more of the older adults in our rural community. As seniors on fixed incomes grow older and more frail, they need to be able to access affordable inhome assistance with activities of daily living – meal preparation, bathing, grocery shopping -- so they can continue to remain independent."

In rural Delaware County, transportation is one of the biggest challenges. "With additional CSE funding, we'll be able to reach older residents who need assistance in getting to dialysis or medical appointments," said Wayne Shepard, Director of the Delaware County Office for the Aging. "Imagine being homebound and not being able to make it to your medical appointments. In addition, the emergency response program (Link-to-Life) is essential for allowing our older residents in Delaware County remain independent. With more CSE funding, we can provide this type of assistance to more older adults in our community. As people continue to grow older and become more frail, we want them to be able to be independent and at the same time when in distress to be able to summon for help."

In the heart of the Adirondacks, Essex County has experienced a double-digit growth in the senior population in the last ten years. "In Essex County we have about 35 people on the waiting list for inhome services (through the Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly program), and their caregivers are barely hanging on," said Patty Bashaw, Director of the Essex County Office for the Aging. "They need support to keep from burning out. Seniors and their families are struggling to keep their loved one at home. Members of the family make sacrifices and, in many cases, resort to quitting their job to care for their loved one, jeopardizing their own financial situation. The CSE funds will be immediately be used to help those on the waiting list, enabling more seniors to stay at home. An added benefit is that the family members can continue working and maintain their financial stability, which bolsters their continued contributions as caregivers. All of which stretches their resources further to remain in the community, slows the spend-down to Medicaid, and delays more costly forms of care."

Clinton County, bordering Canada, experienced a higher than 20 percent increase in the 60-plus population between 2000 and 2010, according to the U.S. Census. "As people age and need more help, they want to be able to stay in their homes," said Crystal Carter, Director of the Clinton County Office for the Aging. "With additional CSE funding, we will be able to reach more older residents who need a few hours of help with housekeeping or personal care. Older residents of our community need the assistance so they don't reach a breaking point that forces them into a nursing care facility."

In the central New York the refrain is the same: "The additional CSE funding in the new budget will help us provide more in-home personal care assistance to more of the older adults in our community," said

Michael Romano, Director of the Oneida County Office for Aging & Continuing Care. "As people grow older and more frail, we want them to be able to help them remain independent. This will help many area agencies on aging fill some of the gaps in services in their communities. Because the CSE funds have a built in flexibility they can be used to alleviate home delivered meal wait lists as well as those on waiting lists for social adult day care and in-home personal care services."

Every day seniors and their caregivers reach out to their local offices for the aging and community agencies for information, assistance and services, and today they have a better chance of receiving those services, thanks to a budget that takes a positive step toward preparing for the "aging tsunami."

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