

2025-26 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature recommends these goals to the NC General Assembly.

- A. **Adult Protective Services (APS).** Pass statutory changes recommended by the Adult Protective Services Improvement Design Team and provide state funding to support needed capacity to protect all vulnerable older and disabled adults across the state.
- B. **Senior Centers.** Create and fund robust senior centers for all counties in the state, to ensure socialization and well-being, to provide information and education, to perform triage in providing appropriate assistance services, and to prevent debilitating isolation.
- C. **Home & Community Care Block Grant.** Create policies that rebalance the system of in-home services versus institutional care, including budget appropriations to ensure continuity of home- and community-based annual services and supports to address the rising number of older adults.
- D. **Older Adult Housing.** Alleviate the severe housing shortage by supporting the availability of safe, affordable, and accessible housing for older adults and help older adults age in place in their homes.
- E. **New Community-Based Services Program.** Establish a funding stream of at least 2 million dollars to be administered by the Division of Aging, outside of the constraints of the Home and Community Care Block Grant Program, that supports services allowing recipients 60+ to live in their homes safely as long as possible.
- F. **Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.** Strengthen the state's Long Term Care Ombudsman Program by addressing staffing concerns associated with paid ombudsman positions and defining roles and responsibilities of the Community Advisory Committee volunteers.
- G. **Healthcare Workforce Crisis.** Address the critical shortage of healthcare workers by addressing the healthcare workforce crisis through expanded financial incentives and support for individuals pursuing careers in healthcare.
- H. **Nursing Home Staffing Standards.** Strengthen nursing home staffing standards by adopting a state required minimum staffing standard at least equal to the current federal regulatory standard of 3.48 hours per resident per day.



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ATTENTION HONORABLE SENATORS & HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES



OUR CALL TO ACTION

We are asking **YOU** to sponsor our legislative agenda goals as bills and get them passed them into law.

Together, the NC General Assembly and the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature can work in partnership to empower and protect all older adults.

CONTACT

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FACT SHEET



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GOAL A: STRENGTHEN ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES STATEWIDE

Pass statutory changes recommended by the Adult Protective Services (APS) Improvement Design Team and provide state funding to support the needed capacity to protect all vulnerable and disabled adults in NC.

BACKGROUND

- In NC, the state does not allocate funds for APS.
- NC General Statute 108A mandates county departments of social services to evaluate reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults through the APS programs. This includes all forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, emotional, mental, confinement, willful deprivation, passive neglect, and financial exploitation.
- The federal Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) provides 21% of the funding for county APS staff and the counties provide the remaining 79%. The state of NC does not allocate funds for APS.
- While pre-pandemic sources estimated approximately one in 10 Americans age 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse, a more recent study found that 1 in 5 older adults reported elder abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. The New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study estimated that only 1 in 24 cases of abuse are reported to authorities. Source: <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-elder-abuse/>

KEY ISSUES

- The federal SSBG funds support each county's Department of Social Services, which includes the APS units. Interdepartmental competing needs result in disparities in the availability of APS resources across counties. SSBG funds earmarked for APS are often depleted by mid-year, if not earlier.
- With the growth in the older adult population, county APS staff are simply overwhelmed by the increased demand in elder abuse cases.
- While the population increase of those age 60+ contributes to the increased number of APS reports, analysis shows that the number of abuse reports has increased per capita as well.
- NC counties report the need for an average of two additional full-time APS staff to address the volume of cases reported each year.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Pass statutory changes recommended by the Adult Protective Services (APS) Improvement Design Team and provide recurring state funding to support the needed capacity to protect all vulnerable and disabled adults in NC.

2024-11-30

FACT SHEET



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GOAL B: CREATE AND FUND SENIOR CENTERS FOR ALL COUNTIES IN NC

Strengthen the statewide senior center network to ensure every county has at least one senior center facility. Robust senior centers safeguard older adults by addressing mental and physical health risks through lowering the risks of isolation, offering outlets for recreation and education, and providing home and community-based services.

BACKGROUND

In 2024, 96 out of North Carolina's 100 counties, have at least one senior center, totaling 171 centers. They are the hubs of a robust and engaged local senior cohort, which benefits the entire community through volunteerism, grandchild care, employment, recreation, and economic stimulation.

- In North Carolina, 26.8% of people age 65 and older live alone and are vulnerable to the mental health stressors of social isolation.
- A 2020 Consensus Study reported research indicates that "lacking social connection and, in particular, scoring high on measures of social isolation, is associated with a **significantly increased risk for early death from all causes.**"

KEY ISSUES

- Without consistently accessible senior centers, which provide a broad spectrum of activities for independent living, older adults are at greater risk of a **lower quality of life and poor health outcomes.**
- Senior centers serve as a **front line of triage**, playing a pivotal role in connecting those who are at-risk and vulnerable to essential services provided in their counties.

- Total funding for senior center operations has **decreased by 18% since 2004** (adjusted for inflation).
- Expanded funding for **senior centers** has been requested by the NCSTHL in all but five years since 1994.
- Funding allocation is based on a certification system whereby a higher certification level results in receiving more shares.
- There are currently 81 senior centers of Excellence, nine Centers of Merit, and 81 uncertified senior centers in the state.
- Due to inflation and more certified centers, the value of a share has decreased by 64% since 2004, which is a disincentive for uncertified senior centers to seek the quality of programming ensured by certification.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Strengthen the statewide senior center network to ensure every county has a facility, which will serve to promote socialization and well-being, provide information and education, to perform triage in providing appropriate assistance services, and to prevent debilitating isolation and mental health issues.

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GOAL C: HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM (HCCBG)

Create policies that rebalance the system of HCCBG in-home services versus institutional care, including recurring budget appropriations to ensure continuity and scope of HCCBG annual services to meet the needs of the growing older adult population.

Background

- HCCBG is composed of federal Older Americans Act allocations and state and local monies. HCCBG is the primary funding source for non-Medicaid home and community-based services for NC seniors age 60+ across the state.
- Local Boards of County Commissioners approve allocations and services funded through HCCBG for their county.

Issues

- There are currently at least 10,000 older adults on the waiting lists for HCCBG services.
- While the population of those age 60+ has increased by 72% since 2004, funding for the HCCBG appropriation has *decreased* by 10%, when adjusted for inflation.
- In the 2023-24 state budget, \$5.0 billion was allocated for older adult services:
 - Medicaid for Older Adults received 73% of the state budget with \$1.65 billion of those funds going to nursing homes (33% of the state budget)

- The Division of Aging and Adult Services received \$106.9 million for home and community-based services which is only 2.14% of the state's older adult budget.

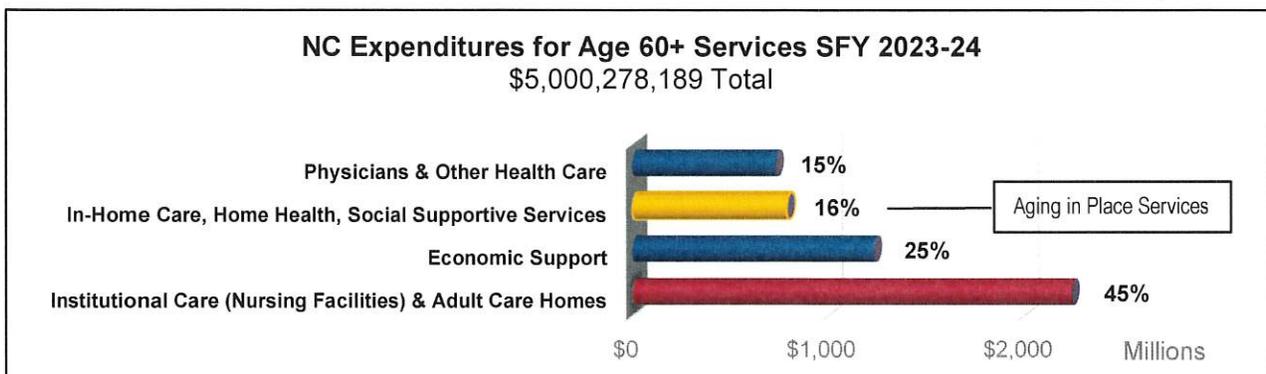
The chart below depicts the disparity between institutional placement versus aging in place.

- Home-based care supports better health outcomes by offering personalized, less disruptive care. CMS research shows a 25% reduction in hospital readmissions with services in the home, lowering overall healthcare costs by as much as 20%.
- Funding for in-home care can boost the caregiving workforce, creating more jobs, especially in underserved areas. Support for training and workforce expansion addresses rural access gaps.

Solutions

Conserve the state's funds by directing money to the less expensive option of supporting the first choice of all older adults, which is to age in their homes and communities.

Create policies that rebalance the system of HCCBG services versus institutional long-term care, including recurring budget appropriations. Policies must ensure the continuity and scope of annual services to allow older adults the choice of aging in place.



FACT SHEET



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GOAL D: OLDER ADULT HOUSING THAT IS AFFORDABLE AND SAFE

Address the severe shortage of safe, affordable, and accessible housing for older adults, enabling them to age with dignity in environments that support their health and promote successful aging.

BACKGROUND

Older adults want to age in their homes as long as possible, but the lack of affordable, accessible, and supportive housing is a major concern in North Carolina. A 2022 AARP survey in partnership with the NC Division of Aging and Hometown Strong found in North Carolina:

- 53% of older adults plan to age in place.
- 30% desire to relocate to accessible, safe, affordable housing.
- This highlights the need for more housing options that allow older adults to live independently and comfortably.

KEY ISSUES

1. **Limited Housing Options:** A shortage of "next" housing options for older adults prevents younger families from moving into available homes.
2. **High Housing Costs:** According to the US Administration for Community Living, in 2021 78% of households led by adults 75+ owned their homes, but 37% of their income went toward housing costs. Renters spent even more—76% of their income on housing. States with higher average rent costs have higher rates of homelessness.
3. **Homelessness Risk:** Homelessness is difficult to measure, but among older adults, it has increased dramatically, with over 10,000 more individuals aged 65+ experiencing sheltered homelessness in 2021 compared to 2019, nationwide. In NC, between 2020 and 2022, homelessness increased 42% in the overall population. HUD reports the annual cost for health and shelter among homeless older adults could amount to \$5 billion.
4. **Home Maintenance Challenges:** Older homeowners often struggle to afford repairs and modifications necessary to stay in their homes, and existing support programs have been underfunded or outdated.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. **Increase Funding for Housing Support:** Expand the NC Housing Trust Fund and other programs aimed at housing repairs, rehabilitation, and modifications.
2. **Improve Property Tax Relief:** Raise income eligibility and exemption/deferral limits for the Homestead Property Tax Exemption and Circuit Breaker Tax Deferral programs.
3. **Expand Housing Incentives:** Increase tax credits for developing new housing or rehabilitating existing homes for older adults.
4. **Support Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs):** Enact a bill to ensure local jurisdictions cannot block the development of ADUs, which can provide additional affordable housing options for older adults.