

Elderly Housing Coalition

2006 Issues Brief

Supporting a Coordinated Approach to National Policy for Seniors Housing and Services

The Elderly Housing Coalition represents national organizations that providing affordable housing and supportive services to elderly families. As our senior population continues to grow, it should come as not surprise to national policy makers that the demand for affordable housing and supportive services will also grow.

Congress must take comprehensive look at federal and federally funded programs that serve the elderly. The Elderly Housing Coalition urges you to support a coordinated approach with the necessary funding resources. The future of our seniors, their families, formal and informal caregivers and the direct service providers depend on your support of this goal.

Development of New Supportive Senior Housing

The goal of keeping seniors from being prematurely institutionalized is repeatedly stymied by the lack of accessible, affordable housing. Escalating housing costs and a decreasing affordable housing stock have devastated low-income seniors, stretching their resources and severely limiting their options.

Seniors rely heavily on all affordable housing programs, from the Sections 202 supportive Housing for the Elderly to Section 8 tenant-based vouchers to the USDA multifamily programs. Seniors account for approximately 16% of Section 8 voucher holders, half of the public housing population and a significant portion of the Section 811 Program for Persons with Disabilities.

Unfortunately, every year the funding for these programs shrinks, leaving fewer and fewer people served. AARP estimates that there are nine seniors waiting for every Section 202 unit that becomes available and changes have forced local public housing authorities (PHAs) to withhold Section 8 vouchers that have been returned because new budget formulas have severely limited their ability to pay for the necessary subsidy.

- *EHC calls on Congress reject the proposed cuts to the HUD budget, provide full funding for the operation of all HUD programs and increase funding for the Section 202 program.*
- *EHC calls on Congress to increase funding for the Section 202 Service Coordinator program and expand the programs to serve rural and public housing, as well as tax credit properties receiving Section 8 subsidy.*

Preservation of Existing Affordable Housing

Preservation of existing affordable housing must also be a Congressional priority. So far, an estimated 15,000 units of affordable housing have been converted to market-rate housing and an estimated 83,000 federally assisted, senior housing units are at risk of

being lost in the near future. Seniors living in affordable housing that is converted need access to enhanced vouchers to remain in their homes. Preservation must also be encouraged by making it possible for not-for-profit housing providers to purchase "at-risk" properties and rehab them for extended use.

- *EHC encourages the expansion of tenant protection, or "enhanced vouchers," for residents and properties preserved by not-for-profit entities.*

Home and Community Based Services and Coordination

Making supportive services available to seniors is good, sound policy. Nursing home costs are rising and both federal and state governments struggle to meet the needs of the conventional long-term care system. Comprehensive community based services is a benefit to governments and seniors. Home health services, adult day care, senior centers, accessible transportation and meals programs are expanding to provide the services needed where seniors live.

Providers are developing with our senior population's needs and desires. Innovative programs are being developed to promote the best care and support in the most cost efficient manner possible. Waivers and grants funded under the Administration's New Freedom Initiative have established consumer-focused programs to control overpayment and staff. Each state now provides family caregiver support and respite services through Older Americans Act funding.

The largest public source of funds for home- and community-based services is Medicaid and the majority of these services are optional, leaving a fragmented system of care throughout the country. Most Older Americans Act and Social Services Block programs have been level-funded or cut in recent years, leaving family with a tremendous financial burden when there is a lack of service providers or public funding sources for their loved ones.

While existing programs are being fully utilized and making it possible for seniors to remain in their homes longer, the existing system of services are isolated within their respective departments. This isolation results in incompatible regulatory barriers that leave seniors, families and providers with varying eligibility criteria and participant requirements. The federal agencies responsible for these programs must come together to streamline and coordinate senior related programs.

- *EHC calls on Congress to support state efforts to provide a full range of flexible home and community based services as a mandatory Medicaid benefit and a cost-effective alternative to institutionalization.*
- *EHC calls on Congress to reject proposed cuts and increase Funding for Federal Service Program, Programs funded under the Older Americans Act, Social Services Block Grants, transportation and caregiver support programs.*
- *EHC calls on Congress to pass legislation establish an Interagency Council on Housing and Service Needs of Seniors, which will include*

representatives from key federal agencies, including HUD, HHS, Administration on Aging, Agriculture, Transportation, Labor, Veterans Affairs, Social Security Administration, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in order to coordinate and to maximize program efficiency, availability and impact.

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