

Foundations of Aging Services in Virginia: An Introduction to DARS, AAAs, and the Older Americans Act

2026 Area Agencies on Aging Governance Webinar Series

LeadingAge Virginia

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Objectives

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Describe the purpose and key provisions of the **Older Americans Act** and why it matters for aging services



Explain the roles of the **State Unit on Aging** and **Area Agencies on Aging** (AAAs) in Virginia's aging services network



Highlight the responsibilities and authority of the **AAA Governing Board** as outlined in the Older Americans Act

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Abbreviations

OAA
- Older Americans Act

SUA
- State Unit on Aging

AAA
- Area Agency on Aging

DARS
- Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

ACL
- U.S. Administration for Community Living

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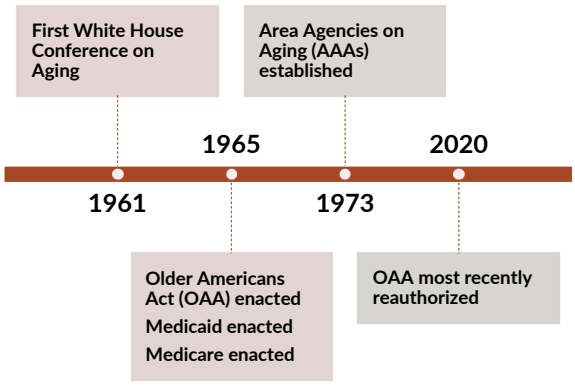
History of the Older Americans Act (OAA)



1965 Great Society Legislation

- Policies aimed at eliminating poverty and racial injustice:
  - Social Security Amendment:
    - Medicare established
    - Medicaid established
  - Housing & Urban Development Act
    - HUD Department established
  - **Older Americans Act**
    - Administration on Aging established
    - State Units on Aging created
    - OAA has been reauthorized 18 times
      - 1973 established Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)

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State Units on Aging (SUA)

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56 SUAs are located in each of the 50 states and 6 territories

The Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) is the designated SUA in Virginia

Scan for VA State Plan for Aging Services 2023-2027

Role of SUAs

Develop and administer the State Plan on Aging	Lead statewide planning, policy development, and administration for aging services and the Older Americans Act	Establish and maintain the state's Planning and Service Areas (PSAs); designate Area Agencies on Aging	Provide technical assistance to relevant agencies and organizations

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Virginia DARS

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- Mission: **To improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families.**
- Some Key Programs and Services:

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Disability Determination Services (for SSDI & SSI)

Adult Protective Services (through local departments of social services)

Disability Services (e.g., Independent Living & Brain Injury Services)

Aging Services

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Scan for DARS website:

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Division for Aging Services

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Mission:

to foster the independence and well-being of older Virginians and support their caregivers through leadership, advocacy and oversight of state and community programs, and guides the Commonwealth in preparing for an aging population.

Role:

oversee the implementation of the federal Older Americans Act (OAA) services as well as other federal and state-funded programs that support older adults and caregivers.

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SUA Activities in Virginia

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- Within DARS, the Division for Aging Services:

Oversees Virginia's 25 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)

- **Distributes federal and state funding to AAAs**
- **Monitors the delivery of aging services by AAAs**

Implements federal and state discretionary grant programs

Leads the No Wrong Door (NWD) Virginia System

Facilitates constituent advisory boards and councils

Develops and implements the State Plan for Aging Services

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Area Agencies on Aging

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- Virginia has 25 AAAs, and each community in Virginia has a designated AAA to serve it
  - AAAs are responsible for a geographic area, also known as a planning and service area (PSA)
- AAA structures vary:

14 AAAs	5 AAAs	5 AAAs	1 AAA
• Private Nonprofit Organizations	• Part of a County or City Government	• Joint Exercise of Powers (local government established)	• Community Services Board (CSB)

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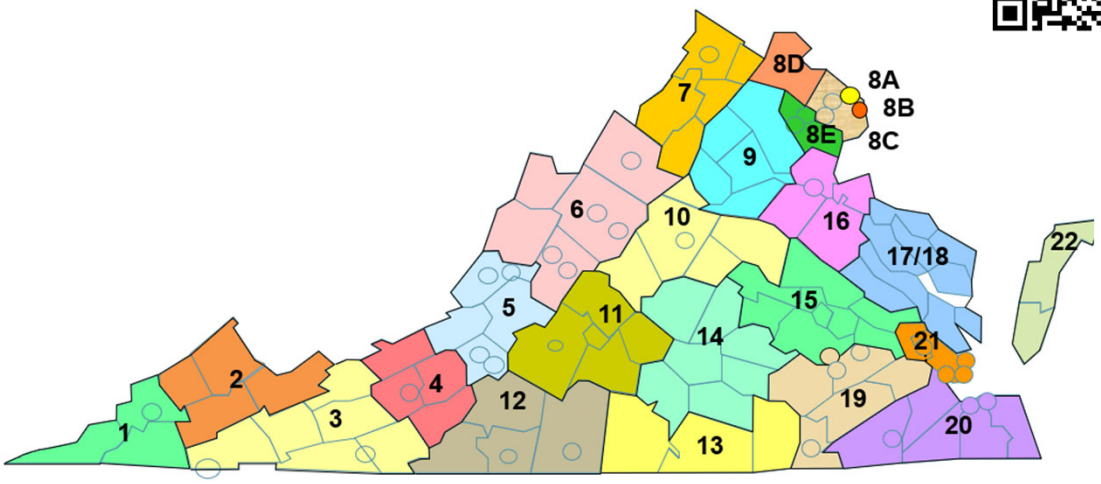
Map of Virginia's AAA's

Scan to for AAA look-Up



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Mission of the Area Agency

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45 CFR 1321.55(a)

The area agency shall proactively carry out, under the leadership and direction of the State agency, a wide range of functions including advocacy, planning, coordination, inter-agency collaboration, information sharing, monitoring, and evaluation.

The area agency shall lead the development or enhancement of comprehensive and coordinated community-based systems in, or serving, each community in the planning and service area. These systems shall be designed to assist older individuals and family caregivers in leading independent, meaningful, healthy, and dignified lives in their own homes and communities.

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OAA Services: Local and State Roles

AAA

Coordinates and provides OAA services directly to older adults and caregivers in the community

SUA

Administers OAA funds to AAAs

Monitors and provides AAAs technical assistance for OAA services

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OAA Funding Stream

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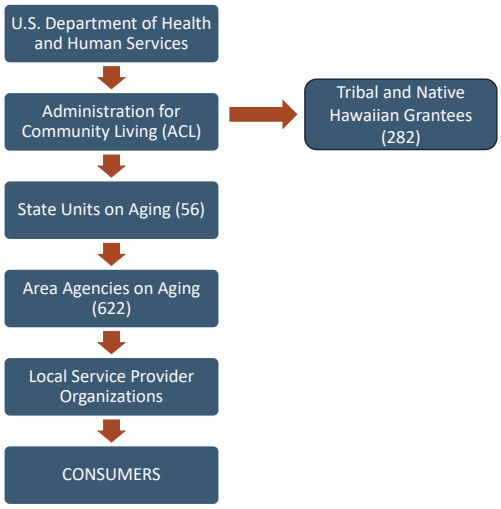

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OAA Funding Scope

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Funding for OAA services is **substantially smaller** than funding for Medicaid services

- In FFY 2023, the federal government spent $2.38 billion on OAA services
- In FFY 2023, the federal government spent $606 billion, and states spent $274 billion on Medicaid ($880 billion total)
- The entire national appropriation for OAA services equals what the state of Delaware spends on its Medicaid program

DARS administers approximately $40 million in federal funding and $20 million in state funding for aging services

FFY = Federal Fiscal Year

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Service Categories by Funding

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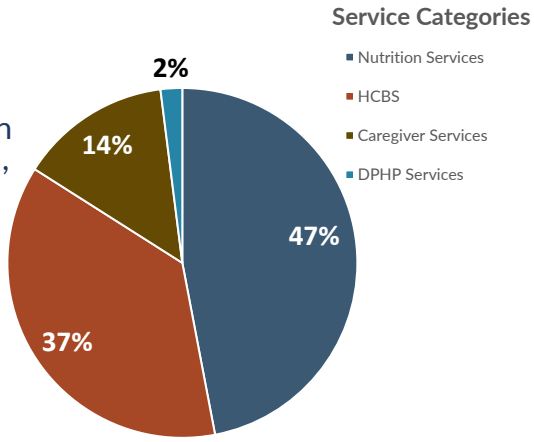
- The largest OAA service category is **Nutrition Services** (e.g., Congregate Meals and Home Delivered Meals or "Meals on Wheels")
- The 2nd largest service category includes an array of **HCBS** (e.g., Information & Referral, Care Coordination, Transportation, Homemaker Services, Chore Services)
- The 3rd largest category is **Caregiver Services**
- And the 4th main category is **Disease Prevention & Health Promotion** (DPHP) Services



Note: These figures do not include funding for the LTC Ombudsman Program or Senior Community Service Employment Program.

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Overview of OAA Programs and Services

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OAA Title III

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Part A: Establishes the Framework
- Maximize Independence and Dignity
- Remove Individual and Social Barriers
- Continuum of Care

State Units on Aging (SUAs)
- Develop and Administer State Aging Plan
- Advocate for Older Individuals
- Designate Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)
- Allocate and Oversee Funding
- Establish Policies, Procedures, Service Standards
- Provide Technical Assistance

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)
- Develop and Administrator an Area Plan
- Assess Local Needs and Target Resources
- Establish Advisory Council
- Coordinate and Oversee Service Delivery
- Establish Focal Points for Service Delivery
- Facilitate Coordination of Community Services

Part B: Support Services & Senior Centers
- Community-Based and In-Home Services: adult day, checking (reassurance), chore, homemaker, personal care, residential repair
- Access Services: care coordination, information and assistance, transportation
- Legal Assistance
- Senior Centers and Other Supportive Services

Part C: Nutrition Services
- Subpart 1: Congregate (Group) Meals
- Subpart 2: Home Delivered Meals
- Subpart 3: General Provisions: dietary requirements, use of registered dietitian, nutrition education and nutrition counseling

Part D: Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Part E: National Family Caregiver Support Program

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Other OAA Title Sections

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Title IV: Activities for Health, Independence and Longevity
- **Demonstration Grants / Programs**
  - Aging & Disability Resource Center Grants
  - Alzheimer's Disease Grants
  - Evidence Based Programs (Chronic Disease Self-Management Program)

Title V: Community Service Senior Opportunities Act
- **Older America Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**
  - Provides community service employment and job training for low-income adults age 55+ to support economic self-sufficiency

Program is managed by the DARS Division for Rehabilitative Services

Title VI: Grants for Native Americans
- Provides supportive and nutrition services for American Indian, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian elders
- Provides family caregiver support services to Native communities

Title VII: Vulnerable Elder Rights Protection Activities
- **Long-term Care Ombudsman Program**

Program is managed by the DARS Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

- **Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Prevention**

Program is managed by the DARS Adult Protective Services Division

- **Legal Assistance Development**

Program is managed by the DARS Division for Aging Services

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General Eligibility

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- Individuals aged 60 and over can qualify for most OAA services. A few programs are available to younger individuals.
- OAA is **not** an entitlement program (i.e., guaranteed access to benefits), like Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid.
- OAA services can be curtailed due to lack of funding.
- OAA clients self-declare income. AAAs do not verify income or ability to pay. Services are not means tested.
- OAA services are targeted to individuals with greatest economic need and greatest social need.
- OAA clients are asked to voluntarily contribute to some OAA services, but it is not required.

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AAA Required OAA Services

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- Under the OAA and through state-established requirements, all AAAs must provide the following services:

Care Coordination	Congregate (Group) Meals	Disease Prevention & Health Promotion	Elder Abuse Prevention	Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program	Home Delivered Meals
Information, Referral & Assistance	Legal Assistance	Nutrition Education	Nutrition Counseling	Options Counseling	Public Information & Education
		Caregiver Support	Transportation		

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Other Optional OAA Services

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Adult Day Care/Services	Assistive Technology	Caregiver Counseling & Training	Care Transitions	Checking (Reassurance)
Chore Services (Heavy Housework)	Consumable Supplies	Emergency Services	Employment (Title V Services)	Financial Consultation
Homemaker Services (Light Housework)	Medication Management	Money Management	Personal Care Services	Residential Repair & Renovation
Respite Care	Socialization & Recreation	Assisted Transportation (door to door)	Volunteer Services	

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How AAAs Deliver OAA Services

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Contract with community providers to deliver services



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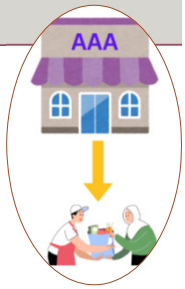
Direct provision of services by the AAA



Programs and service delivery vary across AAAs.

Each AAA designs a menu of programs tailored to the unique needs of its community.

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AAA Non-OAA Services

- Many AAAs offer services and programs outside of the OAA
  - Funded through:
    - State General Funds
    - Grants
    - Donations
    - Fee for service programs
- ➢New services/programs
- ➢Expand services to individuals not eligible for OAA programs

Some Examples:

Veterans Directed Care
- partnership with the VA, this allows veterans to manage their own home and community-based

Medicaid Waiver Services
- providing personal care, case management, and home modifications not covered by OAA funds

Transportation Programs
- Through the *Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation*

Pet Food Programs

DARS Administered Programs
- Senior Cool Care
- Farm Market Fresh
- Virginia Insurance Counseling & Assistance Program (VICAP)

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AAA Governing Boards

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AAA Governing Boards

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- **45 CFR § 1321.55(b)(10)** specifies that an AAA must have a board of directors comprised of leaders in the community, including leaders from groups identified as in greatest economic need and greatest social need, who have the respect, capacity, and authority necessary to convene all interested persons, assess needs, design solutions, track overall success, stimulate change, and plan community responses for the present and for the future.

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Board Responsibilities

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General for all nonprofits

- Strategic planning
- Financial stewardship
- Leadership oversight
- Maintaining bylaws
- Risk management
- Approving policies and procedures
- Comply with grant and contract requirements

Specific to AAA designation

- Approve Area Plans
- Comply with Virginia FOIA laws and public-access procedures

The **Area Plan** is the local blueprint detailing how the AAA will allocate and use federal OAA funds; what services will be provided, how they will be delivered, who will be served, and how need will be identified and prioritized.

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DARS Resources

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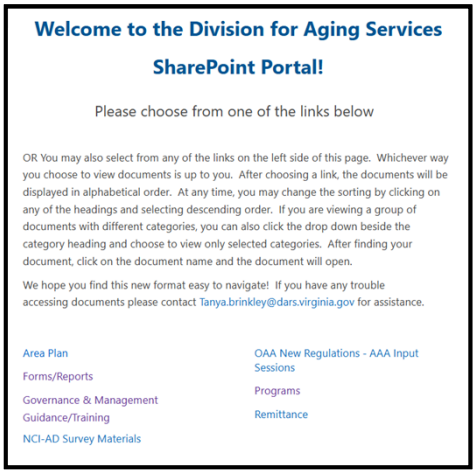
- DARS provides training and technical assistance to AAA leaders (ED/CEO, CFO, program directors) throughout the year:
  - Monthly AAA input sessions
  - Quarterly CFO meetings
  - Other ad hoc assistance as needed
- Forms, policies, training videos, and other materials related to implementing OAA programs are available in the Provider's Portal:

https://sharepoint.wwrc.net/VDAproviders/SitePages/Home.aspx



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AAA Advisory Council

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- **45 CFR 1321.63** requires each AAA to establish an Advisory Council
- The council shall carry out advisory functions relative to:
  - Developing and administering the area plan
  - Representing the interests of older individuals and family caregivers



Individuals may not serve on both the AAA advisory council and the governing board

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References and Resources

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Laws and Regulations:

- Older Americans Act
- 45 CFR Part 1321 Grants to state and community programs on aging
- 22VAC30-60 Grants to Area Agencies on Aging
- Virginia Freedom of Information Act

DARS Resources:

- Provider's Portal
- DARS

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Coming up....

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Session 2: September 2, 10:00 – 11:00 am
Structure, Roles, & Governance Foundations
This session establishes a clear understanding of board authority, roles, and governance responsibilities within the AAA framework. Participants will clarify distinctions between governance and management, define board and executive leadership roles, and review structural considerations such as board composition and committee structure. By creating shared language and role clarity, this session lays the groundwork for effective oversight and board performance.
Speaker: Melissa Andrews, President & CEO, LeadingAge Virginia

Session 3: September 16, 10:00 – 11:00 am
Fiduciary Duties & Legal Accountability
Board members carry significant legal and ethical responsibilities, particularly within publicly funded organizations. This session strengthens understanding of the fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, and applies them directly to AAA operations, including financial oversight, compliance, contracts, conflicts of interest, and risk management. Participants will leave with greater confidence in fulfilling their legal obligations and safeguarding the organization's credibility and resources.
Speaker: Michele McKinnon, Partner, McGuireWoods

Session 4: September 30, 10:00 - 11:00 am
Evolving Governance for Greater Impact
As the aging services landscape evolves, governance must move beyond compliance to strategic leadership. This session explores governance practices that enhance board effectiveness, engagement, and strategic focus. Participants will examine governance maturity, board recruitment strategies, performance dashboards, and tools that help boards address workforce pressures, funding realities, and community impact. The emphasis is on practical, actionable improvements that position AAAs for resilience and innovation.
Speaker: Melissa Andrews, President & CEO, LeadingAge Virginia

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Questions?

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