

# Congress must protect funds for aging America, advocates say

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America's experts on aging are headed for meetings with their senators and representatives to underscore the needs of the country's senior population, spurred by the first-ever Take Action Week organized by The Gerontological Society of America — the nation's largest interdisciplinary organization devoted to the field of aging.

During the September 26 congressional district work period, these advocates will urge their elected leaders to secure funding for aging research and education, as well as reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

"Take Action Week will allow our best and brightest researchers, educators, and practitioners to highlight the importance of their work to improve the quality of life for persons as they [age](#)," said Greg O'Neill, PhD, director of GSA's policy institute, the National Academy on an Aging Society. "The challenges and opportunities presented by America's growing senior population must have a prominent spot on the national agenda."

One of the chief messages that Take Action Week participants will share is that Congress must not make cuts to crucial government-funded aging research, which is heavily concentrated in the National Institute on Aging. The number of Americans age 65 and older will make up 20 percent of the [population](#) by 2030. Late-in-life conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease and dementia, heart disease, and osteoporosis are increasingly driving the need for health care services in this country. Preventing, treating or curing chronic diseases — achieved

through adequately funded biomedical research — is the single-most effective strategy in reducing the costs of these services, the advocates will argue.

Similarly, safeguarding support for education and training will be on the Take Action Week agenda. "Retooling for an Aging America," a 2008 report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM), stated that America's aging citizens are facing a health care workforce too small and unprepared to meet their needs. Aging experts will ask their legislators that federal Pell grants be exempt from cuts in future budget conversations — to ensure that more students have the opportunity to receive proper training. The IOM report estimated that in 2030, there will be approximately 8,000 geriatricians in the U.S., while as many as 36,000 will be required to cover the workload.

The Older Americans Act, currently up for reauthorization, will also receive a lot of attention during Take Action Week. Since 1965, this legislation has aimed to help older people maintain independence in their homes and communities. GSA is recommending significant changes to Title IV of the act in order to increase the authority, rigor, credibility, and accountability of research, demonstration, evaluation, and training activities administered by or through the Administration on Aging.

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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