

Increased funding for geriatrics education essential, study says

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Without a substantial increase in federal funding for geriatrics education and research we risk further decimating a workforce that is essential to training health professionals on the unique healthcare needs of older adults, say researchers reporting on the impact that Geriatrics Academic Career Awards (GACAs) have had on geriatrics academic careers, health professional training, and the care of older adults. In an article for the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, interprofessional experts looked at the impact of the GACA program, which served as a vital resource for more than 200 geriatrics clinicians and educators before it was eliminated as part of a consolidation of several geriatrics training programs in 2015.

Qualitative and quantitative results from the research team's survey of GACA recipients point not only to a growing need for geriatrics skills but also to the importance of dedicated time and financial support to develop emerging geriatrics faculty for [training](#) a U.S. healthcare workforce with the skills and knowledge to optimally care for older adults:

- The 220 GACA recipients have trained between 41,000 and 65,000 health professional colleagues since 1998.
- Ninety-six percent of survey respondents cited GACA-supported opportunities for educational and academic development, professional development, and leadership development as being primary contributing factors to their career success.
- More than 90 percent of respondents noted that the award

improved their teaching, leadership, and collaborative skills. More than 80 percent of the respondents also were promoted during or after receiving GACA funding.

- More than 80 percent of respondents reported leveraging the GACA to "protect" dedicated time for developing courses, workshops, publications, and other training activities that would not have been possible without GACA support. As one respondent observed: "My entire career was influenced positively by the GACA. I was given protected time to develop curricula, to network with other educators, to receive training, and to become a more effective educator."
- Respondents firmly believed that their GACA work enhanced care quality for older adults and caregivers across the U.S. More than 50 percent of the GACA awardees surveyed reported an improvement in their provider skills and education. Nearly a quarter of respondents also were confident their efforts tangibly improved clinical care, satisfaction with the health system, and health outcomes for older men and women.

Against this backdrop, it is becoming clear that eliminating this separate funding stream in support of academic career development has had consequences for geriatrics clinician-educators. One consequence reiterated by several GACA awardees was that it would be "incredibly challenging for new faculty to have the time and financial means to engage in curriculum development, teaching, [program](#) leadership, [and] professional development." Put more bluntly by one survey respondent: "The GACA in many ways made my career possible. As a minority female, it gave me entrance into an academic world that often seems unattainable and closed."

"Our findings suggest that the GACA program has had a significant impact on the academic clinicians who held the award, and that the awardees themselves have provided training that supports health

professionals in delivering high-quality, person-centered care to older adults in the here-and-now," notes Kevin Foley, MD, part of the research team responsible for the study. "Restoring the GACA as a separately funded program under Title VII is important to creating the workforce that we need to care for older Americans."

"The GACA program is an important parallel effort to the current Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP), a newer initiative that has funded 44 centers in 29 states," notes Nancy Lundebjerg, American Geriatrics Society (AGS) Chief Executive Officer. "The GWEP is focused on helping to transform primary care for older adults by providing geriatrics training. The GACA program focuses on developing the geriatrics academic workforce that is required to ensure our entire healthcare workforce has the competency to care for older Americans. The AGS believes that both programs must be funded in the 2018 federal budget if all Americans are to have access to high-quality, person-centered care."

More information: Kevin T. Foley et al, A National Survey on the Effect of the Geriatric Academic Career Award in Advancing Academic Geriatric Medicine, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2017). DOI: [10.1111/jgs.14884](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14884)

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