



February 4, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Majority Whip  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Majority Whip Durbin,

On behalf of the members of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance (EWA or Alliance), we write to you to provide feedback on policies within the Build Back Better Act chiefly, those critical in the care of older adults and workforce, which we believe should move as part of the first package of the build back better priorities. EWA is a coalition of 35 national organizations representing the interdisciplinary care team – older adults, family caregivers, direct care workers, long-term services and supports (LTSS) providers, and health care professionals – joined together to address the immediate and future crisis in caring for an aging America. The Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback as negotiations on the Build Back Better Act progress.

EWA was formed in response to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's (then the Institute of Medicine) critical report *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce*. The report called for immediate investments in preparing our health care system to care for older Americans and their families. Building on that seminal report, EWA proposes practical solutions to improve the quality of care for older adults by strengthening our eldercare workforce. EWA also recognizes the vital role the eldercare workforce plays in driving economic growth and supporting individuals, jobs, and communities across the country.

EWA appreciates the leadership making historic investments in the care of older adults and the eldercare workforce. The following provisions within the Build Back Better Act are critical to improving the quality of care and are supported by EWA:

## **Workforce**

High-quality care for older adults, many of whom have multiple complex chronic conditions, requires a provider team with a diverse range of skills for addressing this population's physical, mental, cognitive, and behavioral needs. Exposure to geriatrics and gerontological principles and practices is essential for all health care providers. The Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement

*The positions of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance reflect a consensus of 75 percent or more of its members and do not necessarily represent the position of individual Alliance member organizations*

Program (GWEP) and Geriatrics Academic Career Awards (GACA), administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, are the only federal programs that train in geriatrics principles. Currently, GWEPs are found in 35 states and two territories and GACAs are in 16 states. This training infrastructure improves the quality of care delivered to older adults in their communities. However, this program has long been underfunded. To close geographic and demographic gaps in geriatrics workforce training and to achieve the goal of expanding access to high-quality home care for older Americans, laid out in the Build Back Better framework, increased funding (at \$84 million) for these programs must be included in the package.

Recruitment and retention among the direct care workforce can be bolstered through policy reforms that improve wages and benefits, training, data collection, public financing, and the overall value of these workers to the health care system and the economy. The Build Back Better Act package should also include critical policy reforms to lift up this workforce, including:

- increased provider payment rates that are passed through to this workforce as part of the \$150 billion to expand HCBS services to older adults and people with disabilities;
- the \$1.48 billion in grants to improve recruitment, education, training retention, and career advancement;
- the \$1.7 billion to address staffing shortages in long-term care facilities through Nursing Home Worker Training Grants;
- training and supportive services to low-income individuals for occupation in the healthcare fields experiencing shortages is advanced by the \$425 million to expand the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG);
- the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III B Home & Community-Based Supportive Services allows the aging network to support this workforce through this \$655 million program.

## **Caregiving**

Family caregivers are the backbone of our long-term care system for older Americans. Yet, they are often marginalized or ignored in the delivery of health care and long-term services and supports. The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) provides a range of support services to family and other unpaid caregivers annually, including counseling, respite care, training, and assistance with locating services that assist family and informal caregivers in caring for their loved ones at home for as long as possible. Build Back Better includes \$150 million for NFCSP services and should be maintained in the first package.

Family caregivers spend on average over \$7,200 annually on caregiving expenses. It is vital that the family caregiver tax credit passed by the Ways and Means Committee, consistent with the Credit for Caring Act, be included in the final budget reconciliation package.

## **Caring For Older Adults**

COVID-19 has made even more urgent the need for home and community-based services (HCBS), which are less expensive than nursing homes, keep families together, and are strongly preferred by older adults. Yet, Medicaid coverage of HCBS is still optional for states, whereas

Medicaid coverage for nursing home care is mandatory, and most states lack the capacity or funding to meet current and future HCBS needs because of major federal underinvestment. The allocation of at least \$150 billion to expand HCBS services for older adults and people with disabilities within the Build Back Better Act will help states to expand services and support the workforce.

OAA programs are critical to the aging network and infrastructure of care provided to older adults. OAA provides direct services that are critical for older adults, including home care, transportation, congregate and home-delivered meals, caregiver support, Native American services, the long-term care ombudsman program, and the Senior Community Service Employment Programs (SCSEP) to meet the job training and placement needs of unemployed low-income older workers. These programs have been underfunded for years, resulting in waiting lists and program limitations. The \$1.3 billion within the Build Back Better Act for targeted funding of the OAA programs and Aging Services will help improve and expand the aging network and improve the availability of services for older adults in the greatest economic and social need.

The Alliance applauds these historic investments for the care of older adults and thanks the Congressional leadership for their work in securing them. EWA reiterates that this is a critical time in providing quality care for older Americans. On behalf of the members of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance, we ask that these care infrastructure priorities remain in the reconciliation package at passage.

If you have any questions, please contact Amy York, Executive Director of EWA [ayork@eldercareworkforce.org](mailto:ayork@eldercareworkforce.org). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nancy Lundebjerg, MPA  
EWA Co-Convener  
212-308-1414  
[nlundebjerg@americangeriatrics.org](mailto:nlundebjerg@americangeriatrics.org)



Michèle J. Saunders, DMD, MS, MPH  
EWA Co-Convener  
210-859-6299  
[drmjsaunders@gmail.com](mailto:drmjsaunders@gmail.com)

[CC: The Honorable Mitch McConnell](#)

[CC: Senate Aging Committee](#)

[CC: Senate HELP Committee](#)

[CC: Senate Finance Committee](#)