

**Donna Harvey**  
**Executive Director**  
**Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging**  
**Waterloo, Iowa**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Donna Harvey. I am from the home state of Senator Grassley and serve as the Executive Director of Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging in Waterloo, Iowa. I want to thank the Committee for inviting me here today to testify on behalf of area agencies on aging nationwide and the role I believe we can and should play with the proposed National Family Caregiver Support Program.

The fundamental mission of area agencies on aging is to help older Americans stay in their own homes and communities with maximum dignity and independence for as long as possible. Area agencies on aging are dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older Americans and their loved ones and caregivers by advocating on their behalf and by providing information about and access to a variety of services in local communities. AAA's often serve as a "single point of information" for the complex and fragmented range of home and community-based services for older adults and their caregivers.

The Older Americans Act binds together 655 area agencies on aging and 232 Title VI Native American aging grantees across the country, providing a consistent structure for planning, service coordination, oversight, and advocacy. AAA's have the infrastructure in place to provide access to a host of services to older adults, links to local seniors and their family caregivers, and ties to a myriad of service providers in their communities. As such, the role of the AAA has steadily expanded to include programs that were not necessarily envisioned in the Older Americans Act when it developed the concept of area agencies on aging. AAA's pride themselves on developing unique and appropriate services and service delivery models based upon consumer choice and local need.

This flexibility positions AAA's to be the natural coordinator of the Family Caregiver Support Program being proposed. Throughout the years, area agencies on aging have had to be very creative in their strategies to meet the needs of older persons particularly those residing in small communities and rural areas where services are very limited.

Additional funds provided through the Family Caregiver Support Program would allow us to work with existing providers to expand their services to better meet the needs of elders and their caregivers while continuing to embrace the importance of utilizing the informal support systems to reduce costs. Provided the funding allows for ultimate flexibility to meet needs, we believe area agencies on aging could continue our creative approaches to unique needs.

In Iowa, we have a case management program for frail elders administered through the state unit on aging and the area agencies on aging. This program is comprised of a screening process, a comprehensive assessment, the development of a care plan by a multidisciplinary team that includes the elder and their caregivers, and the assignment of a case manager to the elder. The case management service is provided at no cost to the elder, however, they are responsible for any charges incurred for the services they receive. Approximately 100 organizations in our 10 county area in Iowa voluntarily participate in the case management program. This system has allowed us a wonderful opportunity to become even more familiar with all the services that are available. The care plan that is developed clearly reflects the roles fulfilled by caregivers and other informal support systems such as churches, neighbors, and volunteer organizations as well as developing a system of formal services to support the informal network. Throughout the process, the client and caregivers are intimately involved to guarantee client choice is the centerpiece of the case plan. The case management program has also allowed us to

become more aware of the needs and dynamics involved with caregiving.

In our service area, we are utilizing vouchers to purchase needed services for seniors without developing a whole new service delivery system. For instance, in small communities, we contract with local restaurants to provide meals, including home delivered meals, to their seniors. We provide vouchers to be used toward the price of a meal if the restaurant cannot provide their daily "blue plate special" for the reimbursement we offer. This accomplishes several things. It keeps seniors in their communities interacting with long-time acquaintances, it provides a hot, noon meal that meets the nutritional requirements and it supports small business owners who struggle to keep their businesses operating. We have expanded this system to purchase unique items that make the seniors safe and able to stay in the home. For instance, we have worked with local volunteer fire departments to purchase and install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. We have also done home adaptations and purchased adaptive equipment on behalf of seniors. We try to work with local businesses to purchase and install these items. Since the mid-1970's, AAA's have demonstrated an extraordinary record of achievement in stretching a limited amount of federal money to help hundreds of thousands of older people avoid or delay costly nursing home placement and to help them remain independent in their community near their loved ones. In the past 20 years, the older population in America has grown twice as quickly as all other age groups. The 85 and older age group is expected to be seven times its present size by the year 2050 (U.S. Select Committee on Aging, 1988). This population trend will result in a large number of frail elderly in need of caregiving services. The Family Caregiver Support Program and funding will allow us to continue to work with existing and new providers to expand services to elders and their caregivers.

Almost daily, area agency on aging staff meets with family members serving as caregivers. Unfortunately, these persons are generally at a crisis point. They have attempted to fulfill the role of caregiver without preparation and support. They are exhausted, frustrated, frightened, and torn between their roles as caregiver to older relatives, their spouses, their children, and friends. While we can generally provide access to support services to be purchased, it is not so easy to address the personal dynamics, especially guilt, involved between parents and adult child caregivers. Education of caregivers is critical to their ability to continue to provide this support to our Older Americans and to keep older persons in their homes and communities.

Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging is in the early discussion stages with the community colleges in our area to offer caregiving support instruction. The adult education director from Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo has expressed interest based upon requests she has received for this type of training. The National Family Caregiver Support Program could help facilitate this process. The Community Colleges offer courses through Iowa's Communication Network (ICN). The ICN is available in schools and libraries in virtually every community throughout our state making the information available at a very reasonable cost and easily accessible. Education is critical to those who are currently caregivers or know they will be soon, however, I believe education needs to begin in elementary school about the important role family members play in caring for each other and to provide basic information about aging and special needs.

Area agencies on aging are recognized for their ability to collaborate with existing organizations and systems to develop support groups. These groups are important to give caregivers avenues to share ideas, frustrations, and develop partnerships. An important aspect in developing a support group system is the provision of care for the loved one while the caregiver participates in these activities. Currently, funding is not readily available for this type of support. In addition, respite services are vitally important to both the older person and their caregivers. Options need to be developed which will meet the needs of the senior and their caregiver. Many times, it is just as important for the caregiver to have time at home to relax without the older person as well as it is to have someone come to the home to provide care while the caregiver participates in the community. Again, area agencies on aging work to identify options that

meet particular needs.

Recently, Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging began a collaborative program with Covenant Health Systems in Waterloo to develop a patient advocate program. The concept of this program is to match trained volunteers with elderly patients through the hospital social work department. The philosophy of this program is that older persons often paint a "rosy" picture for the social worker and enhance the role of family, neighbors, and friends in their caregiving roles without letting those persons know. They deny the need for assistance offered through the social work department not realizing the challenges they could face. Once they get home, they soon discover that these persons may not be available or interested in providing this support. Through this volunteer program, the trained volunteer meets with the patient while they are still hospitalized to review existing community services and to do a friendly visit. Once the patient is discharged, this volunteer will follow up with the older person to see if their needs have changed once they are home. The volunteer asks the patient to allow the volunteer to make a referral to the area agency on aging on their behalf to provide any information and assistance with home and community based services. The program is very new so I cannot report any successes (or failures!), however, this is an attempt to address the importance of support systems to frail elders. If it is beneficial to elders and their caregivers, we will replicate the program throughout our 10 county area and make the information available to any other area agency on aging nationwide.

As the Family Caregiver Program is developed, we must remember that many times, older persons are caregivers. Our Board President, John Hawse, who is here today, recently found himself in the role of caregiver. John's daughter who is in her 50's suffered a stroke and is now wheelchair bound. John quickly found that locating services for a 50 year old person who was qualified for any formalized disability services was complex, difficult, and expensive. Our staff at the area agency on aging worked with him to provide him information and assistance on accessing services, housing, adaptive equipment, and provided him support throughout this process. I believe John could be a national spokesperson for the ability of the area agency on aging to have the information, patience, and tenacity it takes to work with complex funding systems and service barriers that exist. While the Family Caregiver Support program is geared to caregivers of older persons, it needs to have the flexibility to also provide support and assistance to older persons carrying out the role of caregiver.

Area agencies on aging cannot continue to provide this kind of outreach, information, and assistance to a rapidly increasing older population without increased or additional funding sources. We are prepared and uniquely positioned to carry out the responsibilities of the Family Caregiver Support Program, however, adequate funding is necessary to insure its success. We are pleased the Administration recognizes the Older Americans Act as the natural place to expand services provided to assist caregivers. This initiative will enable many older persons to remain in their homes and out of more expensive institutional settings while providing a quality life envisioned by all Americans. This allows us a wonderful opportunity to strengthen families by providing them assistance in dealing with the challenges of being a caregiver to their loved ones.

Area agencies on aging commend you and your staff for holding this hearing on this new and exciting initiative that affects so many Americans. Funding for this program will make a tremendous difference in the ability of area agencies on aging and Title VI grantees to assist caregivers in local communities. We look forward to a continued working relationship with you and your staff as this program is developed.