

STRATEGY 22

Strengthen Adult Protective Services

- a. The North Carolina General Assembly should work with Adult Protective Services (APS) at the state and local levels and advocates for older adult to evaluate the current state statute for APS to identify opportunities for modernization and funding.
- b. Fulfill the 2023–2024 Senior Tar Heel Legislature priority of increasing recurring funding for Adult Protective Services by \$8 million.

Priority of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature 2023–2024

Allocate an additional \$8M in recurring funds for Adult Protective Services (APS) to address staff shortages.

In SFY 21, APS received 32,075 reports across the state, compared to 14,001 reports in SFY 2005-06, reflecting an increase of 129% in 17 years.

Desired Result – There will be proactive intervention to prevent maltreatment and self-neglect of older adults.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – Adult Protective Services (APS) provides a vital lifeline to the most vulnerable older adults and people with disabilities in our communities. The rise of APS reports over the years, coupled with insufficient funds and staffing, means that these vulnerable community members are at risk for fraud and abuse. To ensure that older adults can be safe as they age in their homes, the task force recommends that APS laws be modernized and funding increased.

What Is Adult Protective Services?

Services provided to ensure the safety and well-being of elders and adults with disabilities who are in danger of being mistreated or neglected, are unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from harm, and have no one to assist them.

– APS Presentation to the NCIOM Task Force on Healthy Aging

Context – According to the UNC School of Government ncIMPACT Initiative, “at least 10% of elders are abused in some way each year, including through physical abuse, financial fraud, scams, caregiver neglect, psychological abuse and sexual abuse.”³⁰ The APS statute in North Carolina was developed to help older adults when they are unable to take care of themselves and if they have no one able to assist with essential services. This law was written in 1975 and has not been updated since. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services is engaged in an APS improvement project to address reform needs. One area that current law does not address is how to address self-neglect and other forms of maltreatment with early action. Colorado APS is piloting a program that meets this need through an alternative response to low-risk allegations by providing “opportunities for APS staff, clients, and their families to work together to best meet the needs of at-risk adults and mitigate harm in a supportive way.”³¹

It is estimated that only about 1 in 24 cases of elder abuse is reported to authorities.³² According to APS reports, the most common form of mistreatment is neglect, including self-neglect and caretaker neglect.³³ In North Carolina for State Fiscal Year 2019-2020, 83% of reports involved older adults who lived alone or with family (rather than in an institution).³³ Sixty four percent of reports involved self-neglect.³³ The number of reports has risen steadily over the past two decades and reached 34,470 reports in 2022.³⁴

APS Funding

In North Carolina, the federal Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) provides 21% of the funding for county Division of Social Services (DSS) staff, leaving the counties to provide the remaining 79%.³² There are currently no funds allocated from the state. These funds are often depleted by halfway through a calendar year.³² This funding is also shared with local social services departments, which can result in fewer resources directed to APS.³⁵ Most counties report that they are in need of two additional full-time APS staff members to adequately address the needs of older adults in their communities.³²

The North Carolina Coalition on Aging (NCCOA) also recommends additional investment of state dollars in APS to provide funding for program staff and essential services. With the substantial rise in APS reports, an increase in staffing will allow the evaluation of more claims of older adult neglect and mistreatment.

Programs to Provide Check-Ins with Older Adults

In North Carolina, multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) have been created to combat older adult abuse. These teams may include judges, APS social workers, physicians, law enforcement, and psychologists. MDTs are tasked with reviewing cases of abuse in the community and addressing systemic change to curb the issue of elder abuse.

Local examples of MDTs include the Wake County Sheriff’s Office re-implementation of the Citizen Well Check Program, a service for Wake County residents aged 65 and older. These wellness checks consist of daily calls from the Sheriff’s Office to check in on the older adult. If there is no answer by the third call, their emergency contact is notified. Other programs include Wellness Watch in Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and surrounding areas, which offers weekly calls by a care team designed to provide important health information and two hour-long in-home wellness visits per month.

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Adult Protective Services can identify issues of neglect and mistreatment that can impact the safety of an older adult’s home, their ability to care for themselves, difficulty meeting nutritional needs, and their connection to other people.