



For Immediate Release
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**HHS Announces \$1.9 Million Effort to Help Seniors and Adults with Disabilities
Have Improved Access to Benefits**

Grant Will Create National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment

HHS Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina G. Carbonell has announced that older Americans and adults with disabilities will have improved access to available community services and supports, including benefits to which they are entitled, under a \$1.9 million grant awarded by the Administration on Aging (AoA).

AoA is issuing a grant to the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to establish the National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment. AoA is creating the Center to support local outreach and enrollment projects targeted at seniors and people with disabilities. The establishment of the Center is another part of AoA's approach to integrating services and benefits and to implementing the new outreach provisions that were recently incorporated into the Older Americans Act.

“The Center will further augment the tremendous efforts of AoA's national network of local aging service providers and organizations who assist individuals access the full range of available public and private community services and supports designed to help them remain in their own homes and communities,” said Assistant Secretary Carbonell. “This collaboration with NCOA complements the ongoing work of the Department and the network to assist individuals with their health and long-term care choices.”

Through web-based technology, the Center will simplify access to services, resources and benefits at the federal, state and local level that seniors and people with disabilities need. For example, AoA is working with other federal partners such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the United States Department of Agriculture to expand outreach to persons who are eligible for, but not accessing, the Low Income Subsidy extra help assistance for Medicare prescription drugs and assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp program. The Center will provide easy-to-use tools for accessing these and other programs and benefits.

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“NCOA is very excited to house the National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment as a technical assistance resource to the network of organizations serving seniors and people with disabilities,” said James Firman, NCOA President and CEO. “We will work closely with the full array of AoA’s national network which is well-suited to utilize cost-effective, person-centered strategies for accessing services and benefits.” The network consists of State Units on Aging, Tribal Organizations, Area Agencies on Aging, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, State Health Insurance Assistance Programs, and community-based service provider organizations.

The Center will reach people nationwide through the use of web-based tools and by establishing Benefits Enrollment Centers (BECs) in ten areas of the country designed especially to help seniors in need and people with disabilities find and enroll in all the benefits programs for which they are eligible. The AoA grant funds will be used by the Center to:

- Increase the use of web-based screening and enrollment tools with aging and disability organizations, older people and younger adults with disabilities, their families and caregivers;
- Maintain, update and enhance current web-based benefits screening and enrollment systems;
- Foster the use of cost-effective benefits outreach and enrollment strategies by BECs and aging and disability service providers;
- Provide training and technical assistance to BECs and the larger aging and disability communities;
- Develop an online information clearinghouse of cost-effective, promising practices related to benefits outreach and enrollment.

The U.S. Administration on Aging funds a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to deliver a comprehensive and cost-effective system of long-term care that helps elderly individuals maintain their independence and dignity in their homes and communities. For more information, visit <http://www.aoa.gov> .

NCOA is a leader in helping people of limited means find benefits. In particular, NCOA will bring to the Center experience with its free online service, called BenefitsCheckUp which has helped more than two million older people find more than \$6.6 billion in annual benefits. For more information about NCOA, visit <http://www.ncoa.org> .

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