



# AZ Aging

## AZAging's Report of Activities of Area Agencies on Aging

### Arizona Legislative Session

Arizona's Legislative session began in January 2024, with Governor Hobbs releasing her proposed budget. Through both administrations, we've been pleased to see the commitment from both the administrations and the Legislature to fund Area Agencies on Aging to provide critical in-home supportive services to older adults and those who care for them. Last year, the Legislature passed and Governor Hobbs signed a budget that included an increase of \$10 million, \$5 million of which was for a pilot program for housing assistance and \$5 million was for on-going services and support for Area Agencies on Aging to address inflation and the direct care workforce shortage.

Unfortunately, this year, the Governor's Office was not able to prioritize the continuation of those funds in her proposed budget. With that in mind, we are working with the Legislature to ensure that the \$5 million for on-going services that was appropriated last year to address inflationary pressures continues for years to come. Though the on-paper effect of the Governor's proposed budget shows no cuts to Area Agencies on Aging, the reality is that without a continuation of funds, Area Agencies on Aging across the state would have to cut service hours and clients to ensure fiscal sustainability. We urge legislators to support the addition of \$5 million into the base for Area Agencies on Aging to accomplish this goal.

### Housing Assistance Early Success

Last legislative session, the Legislature passed and Governor Hobbs signed into law a \$5 million one-time appropriation for the Area Agencies on Aging to create a pilot housing assistance program for older adults. These funds were released to Area Agencies on Aging in October, and after working closely with the Arizona Department of Economic Security, early success is beginning to show. As of February, 419 people have received funding through this program to assist them with one time housing costs to ensure their housing stability. These costs are wide ranging and could involve critical home safety repairs (including ramps and grab bar installation), assistance with paying past due property taxes, rental down payments for an affordable home, and other one-time expenses that an older adult might need to secure affordable housing. Though there's still a long way to go in our program's provision of service, we are excited to see the early success of the Area Agencies on Aging.

Welcoming Celeste Vasquez, SEAGO Area Agency on Aging



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At the end of 2023, Laura Villa, long-time director of SEAGO Area Agency on Aging left her position. In January, SEAGO hired Celeste Vasquez to be the Program Director of SEAGO Area Agency on Aging. Celeste joins us with the experience of a long career in health care, having worked previously for a qualified community health center in southeastern Arizona. We are excited to welcome Celeste to our board of directors and have SEAGO's continued engagement in AZAging.

## Leadership Changes

As mentioned in the previous report, Maddy Bynes has stepped down as the contracted director of AZAging, though she remains on board through the first quarter of 2024 to assist in transitioning workloads to a new firm. We are pleased to welcome Samantha Orth with Pinnacle Public Affairs to our team as our new contracted director. Samantha comes to AZAging with a multitude of experiences, including a degree in Public Policy from Arizona State University, an internship at the Arizona State Legislature, a tenure in the Office of Governor Doug Ducey, and time working with Strategies 360. Samantha is joined by Steve Moortel of Pinnacle Public Affairs, who will remain AZAging's contracted lobbyist. We are excited to have Samantha on board!

Should you have any questions, please contact Samantha Orth at [samantha@pinnacle-pa.com](mailto:samantha@pinnacle-pa.com) or (623) 696-6672.