**The Older Americans Act and Diverse Elders:   
New Solutions for Critical Constituencies**

On July 16, 2015, the Senate passed a reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, an important piece of legislation that is considered the “crown jewel” of aging policy. As attention now turns to the House of Representatives, there is increased pressure to pass what has historically been bi-partisan legislation.

The Diverse Elders Coalition (DEC) recognizes the vital role that the OAA plays in the delivery of services to all elders. As a coalition that works to address the unique needs of elders of color, American Indian and Alaska Native elders, and LGBT elders, we also know that the constituencies that are the most marginalized require services that meet our communities’ needs in specific ways and that cookie cutter approaches do not work. The DEC has worked in solidarity with other aging advocacy organizations as well as other allies to support approaches that address diverse elders. Provisions in legislation such as the *Improving Services and Activities for Diverse Elders Act of 2012* and the *LGBT Elder Americans Act of 2015* were not included in the bill that was voted out of the Senate.

The DEC has identified specific priorities for the Congress to consider as it debates the needs and concerns of all our elders:

**Data Collection and Research: Naming the Issues and Naming the Solutions**

* Legislation should specifically identify constituencies that are particularly vulnerable, including communities of color, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and LGBT communities, especially in provisions that refer to communities with “minority status” and with “greatest social need.”
* Data collection, project assessments, and reporting requirements in legislation should be amended to ensure that all racial and ethnic groups, American Indians/Alaska Natives, as well as LGBT older adults, are provided the opportunity to participate in research that provides greatest benefit to the community. This includes employing techniques, utilizing resources, and creating partnerships with organizations that have demonstrated expertise in working with diverse communities.
* Legislation should identify additional mechanisms to more specifically address the needs of diverse elders and explore new ways to provide services to them.

**Cultural and Linguistic Competence: Specific Solutions for Specific Constituencies**

* Legislation should include provisions that promote cultural and linguistic competence for all racial and ethnic groups, American Indian/Alaska Native, as well as for LGBT older adults, across physical and mental health, and wellbeing.
* Cultural competency in family structures is an important determinant of program eligibility- defining who is legally connected to whom for purposes of receiving services. Provisions should acknowledge the various family structures that are present in diverse communities, and explicitly reference a broader range of family relationships, especially in ways that better serve the most vulnerable constituencies.
* Provisions should address specific disparities that exist for different communities in terms of social determinants of health and other outcomes. Identifying these disparities and solutions to address them should be a priority.

**Non-Discrimination and Equal Treatment under Law: Solutions for Protecting the Most Vulnerable**

* Elder justice is an important aspect of the Older Americans Act and protecting older adults that experience multiple forms of discrimination and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and national origin, needs to be a priority.
* Provisions that specifically ensure compliance with current federal law requiring access to services for elders with limited English proficiency should be prioritized.
* Many elders have different citizenship statuses and/or live in families with mixed status. Provisions that support these elders and their caregivers should not be denied because of citizenship status.
* Federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.
* Other areas that have a federal relationship with the U.S. government, including Puerto Rico, Native Hawaiian homestead land, and/or other territories, commonwealths, or jurisdictions with other political status deserve consideration and their residents should be included as well.

The DEC supports the Older Americans Act as a key piece of civil rights legislation. The communities we serve have been part of other civil rights and social justice struggles and know what it means to face discrimination on a variety of fronts. Their knowledge informs our advocacy and support for legislation that more fully recognizes the impact of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia on our elders.

We ask for equity in service delivery because aging policies affect all American communities including a growing base of people of color, American Indian/Alaska Native, and LGBT Elders.

In order to fully realize the intent of the Older Americans Act, we must ensure that all elders receive services regardless of any social, cultural or geographic, barriers they may face so they can age in place with dignity.

Diverse Elders Coalition Members:

National Indian Council on Aging, (NICOA)

National Hispanic Center on Aging (NHCOA)

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)

Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SERAC)

Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)