

Massachusetts' Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) provide essential services that help older adults and people with disabilities remain safe, healthy, and independent in their communities. The FY27 budget presents an opportunity to strengthen the community-based supports that prevent crises, reduce costly institutional care, and stabilize the aging services network. The following priorities represent targeted investments that deliver measurable impact for older residents and the Commonwealth.

Nutrition Services Programs [line item 9110-1900]: Fund at \$19,210,963 (increase of \$5.8 million) to address ongoing funding shortfalls and sustain meal access for older adults statewide.

Prescription Advantage [line item 9110-1455]: Fund at \$8,830,888 to restore \$2.2 million for Options Counseling and maintain statewide consumer access to benefits counseling and support. Restore a \$2 million earmark for SHINE to ensure adequate statewide capacity for Medicare and health insurance counseling services.

Home Care Case Management [line item 9110-1633]: Add language requiring payment through the Chapter 257 rate-setting process to ensure compliance with established state law.

Supportive Senior Housing Program [line item 9110-1604]: Fund at \$13,080,722 (increase of \$698,450) to fully support services at established Chapter 257 rates.

Congregate Housing [line item 9110-1660]: Fund at \$3,320,695 (restore \$1,601,537) to preserve this cost-effective housing model that prevents unnecessary institutional care.

Fully funding these priorities will protect access to critical services and ensure older adults can age with dignity in their homes and communities. Strategic investment now will reduce long-term costs while strengthening the Commonwealth's commitment to older residents and their caregivers.

Nutrition Services Programs [line item 9110-1900]

*Fund at \$19,210,963: **increase of \$5.8 million***

The Nutrition Program delivers meals to older adults in their own homes - commonly referred to as “Meals on Wheels” - and provides meals at hundreds of congregate meal sites, including local Councils on Aging and senior affordable housing sites. Statewide, Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) provide more than **10 million meals each year** to older adults, many of whom are food insecure and rely on these meals not only for essential nutrition but also for a daily safety check.



In FY25, ASAPs experienced a \$5.8 million shortfall driven by a significant increase in both food costs and consumer demand due to rising food insecurity. Ensuring that older adults have reliable access to nutritious meals is a statewide priority that should be sustainably supported through the Commonwealth’s budget.

Prescription Advantage [line item 9110-1455]

*Fund at \$8,830,888: **restore \$2.2 million for Options Counseling and add SHINE earmark***

The Prescription Advantage line item now includes funding for **Options Counseling** (previously funded through line item 9110-0600), a free service to help older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers and loved ones learn about and navigate resources and care options, including housing availability. Options Counseling **serves 5,000 to 6,000 Massachusetts residents each year**, the vast majority of whom rely on the program to help them remain in the community, or return to the community from a hospital, rehab, or long-term care admission¹. To sustain this critical support and ensure consumers and caregivers across the Commonwealth can continue to access Options Counseling services, funding should be restored to FY26 levels to meet current demand.

The Prescription Advantage line item also includes funding for the **SHINE** (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) program, **a free program delivered by volunteers** which **assists more than 100,000 individuals each year** in understanding their Medicare, MassHealth and other insurance benefits and their affordability. We request that the following earmark be restored to ensure that adequate funding is allocated for the SHINE Program: “provided further, that not less than \$2,000,000 shall be expended for the Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone, or SHINE, program, administered by the executive office in partnership with local community-based organizations including, but not limited to, councils on aging, aging services access points and others, in order to support the operational costs incurred by these programs.”

Home Care Case Management [line item 9110-1633]

Add earmark language

Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2008 requires the Commonwealth to establish uniform, transparent rates for human services that are “reasonable and adequate to meet the costs” of delivering those services, replacing the prior system of individual contracts with maximum obligations. The continued use of an “accommodation rate” for Home Care Program case management departs from this framework by separating reimbursement from the actual cost of providing required services, contrary to Chapter 257’s purpose of aligning state funding with the real cost of care.

A network analysis of FY25 found that AGE’s application of the accommodation rate resulted in **ASAPs receiving \$10.1 million less reimbursement** than they would have under established Chapter 257 rates, reflecting **more than 51,000 units of case management services delivered but not reimbursed** at an adequate rate, impacting consumers and workforce stability.

To ensure implementation consistent with current state law, we respectfully request that the following language be added: “provided further that funds from this line item will be paid to the Aging Services Access Points for each unit of service provided at the rate established in 101 CMR 417 through the Chapter 257 rate setting process.”

Supportive Senior Housing Program [line item 9110-1604]

Fund at \$13,080,722: increase of \$698,450

Elder supportive housing provides **critically important, on-site services that help low-income older adults remain safely housed and avoid premature institutional care** at a time when Massachusetts faces a severe shortage of affordable housing options. By pairing stable housing with service coordination, the program helps residents manage health needs, access community-based services, and maintain independence, making it a key strategy for preventing and addressing homelessness among older adults in the Commonwealth. The additional funding will **ensure the program is fully funded in accordance with established Chapter 257 rates**, allowing providers to meet the true cost of delivering these essential supports and to sustain service capacity in existing sites.

Congregate Housing [line item 9110-1660]

Fund at \$3,320,695: restore \$1,601,537 to fund at FY26 level

AGE data shared with the ASAPs show that **the Governor’s proposed funding cut to this line item would end Resident Services Coordination at 18 sites statewide**. The Congregate Housing program helps to address the significant shortage of affordable and appropriate housing options available to older adults across the Commonwealth, providing older adults with affordable, service-enriched housing that combines private living units with shared spaces, daily meals, and access to supportive services, allowing residents to maintain independence while receiving the assistance they need. **Fully funding the program in FY27 is critical to preserving this cost-effective alternative to institutional care, preserving tenancy and housing stability, preventing avoidable nursing home placements, and ensuring that low and moderate income older adults can age safely in community settings.**