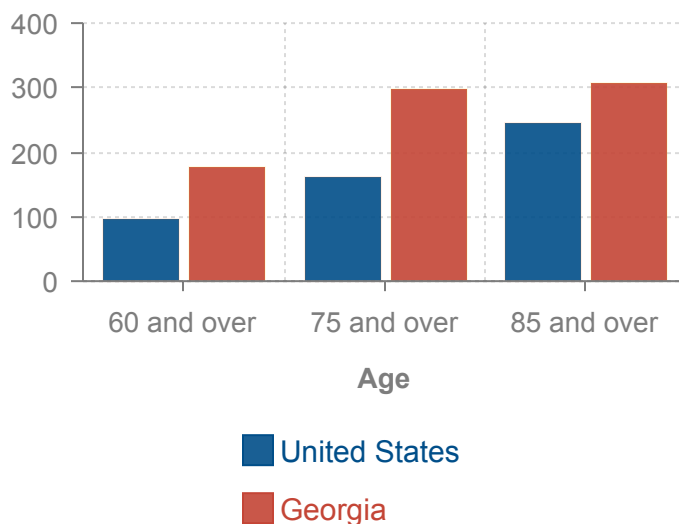


Combating Elder Abuse and Hunger in Georgia

Georgia has the 11th fastest growing population aged 60 and over in the United States, which is expected to increase an additional 65.8% between years 2010 and 2030 (2010 Census). Georgia's population aged 85 and over, which is the fastest-growing age group, is expected to increase an astonishing 306.5%, totaling 462,723 persons in 2050. Like many states, Georgia has committed to meeting the growing needs of this population, both fiscally and legislatively, to ensure that the state's most vulnerable citizens continue to be supported.

**% Increase in Population by Age Group
2010 - 2050**



The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Aging Services (DAS) is the federally-designated unit on aging for the state of Georgia. Some of the programs and services provided within DAS include: Non-Medicaid Home and Community Services (HCBS), Caregiver Programs and Services, Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC), Adult Protective Services, and The Public Guardianship Office. Georgia's Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are part of a nationwide network of state and local programs designed to help older people plan and care for their lifelong needs. Georgia is divided into 12 regions, with each respective AAA regional office serving as the primary provider arm of DAS.

Elder Abuse

The National Council on Aging reports that one in 10 Americans aged 60 and over have experienced some form of elder abuse, and as many as five million seniors are abused each year. Studies also show that only one in 14 of these incidences are reported to authorities (National Research Council, 2003). Unfortunately, as this population ages, the occurrence of elder mistreatment is expected to increase. As a response, Georgia has invested millions of dollars and passed several pieces of legislation to combat elder abuse in recent years.

In 2013, the General Assembly passed House Bill 78, which updated Georgia's elder abuse laws for the first time in nearly three decades by expanding the scope of persons protected from neglect or exploitation and enhancing mandatory reporting of abuse.

In 2015, Georgia further bolstered its elder abuse laws by passing House Bill 72, which enables cases to be tried in the jurisdiction where any violation occurred or any county where the victim resides. Secondly, when a report is made to an adult protection agency that a disabled adult or elder person is in need of protective services or has been abused, neglected, or exploited, the agency must immediately make a reasonable determination as to whether the incident alleges actions that constitute a crime. If a crime is suspected, this information must then be included in the report and reported to an appropriate law enforcement agency.

Additionally, House Bill 72 allows prosecutors to try crimes as Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) violations in order to hold groups accountable for defrauding or abusing elderly and/or vulnerable adults. Furthermore, if a person is convicted of the felony offense of operating an unlicensed personal care home in conjunction with abuse, neglect, or exploitation, that conviction constitutes a crime that precludes an owner from obtaining a license to operate a facility.

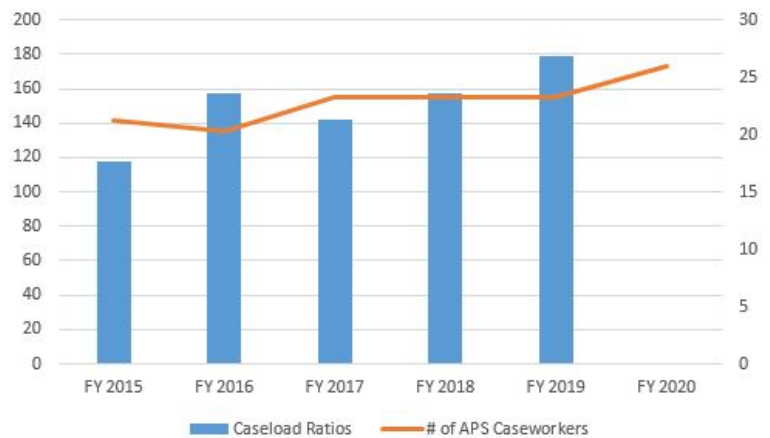
In 2018, Senate Bill 406 required Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprinting in background checks of employees with direct access to patients in long-term care settings such as nursing homes, personal care homes, and home health-care. This bill also created the Central Caregiver Registry, which allows employers to search for caregiver background checks.

In the same year, the Georgia General Assembly also passed House Bills 803 and 635. House Bill 803 creates the crime of trafficking an at-risk adult to steal their benefits. According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, this bill addresses the issue of warehousing older Georgians and Georgians with disabilities without proper care while taking their Social Security and other benefits. These operators often move residents to other locations to avoid law enforcement, and House Bill 635 helps local communities create task forces to investigate. This legislation is expected to yield successful prosecutions of elder abusers.

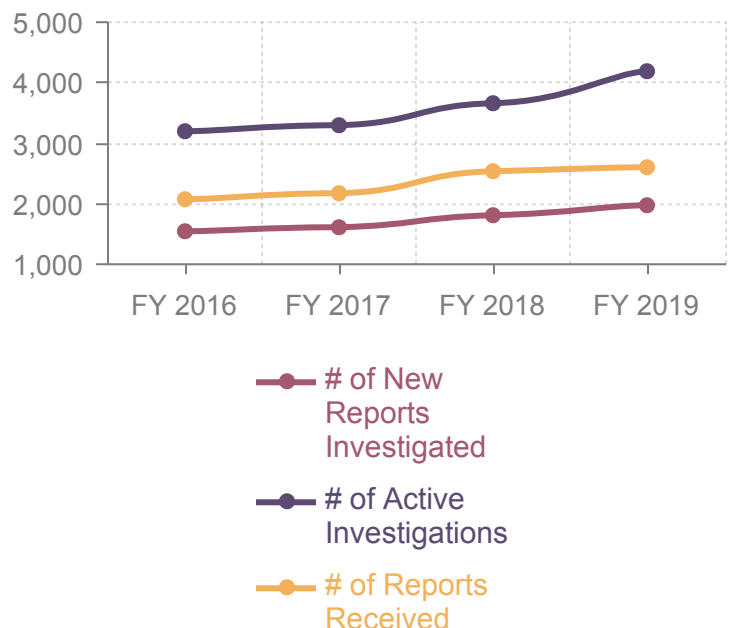
Investing in the Battle Against Elder Abuse

Adult Protective Services (APS) is the state entity charged with investigating all reports of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of older persons aged 65 and over or any adults aged 18 and over with a disability who do not reside in long-term care facilities. With increasing reports of elder abuse, due largely to the increasing elder population, Georgia continues to target funding to combat elder abuse (National Council on Aging). The state has invested over \$4.5 million since FY 2015 for additional APS caseworkers and related staff, which includes \$1.3 million in the FY 2020 budget. The latest round of funding for an additional 17 APS caseworkers is expected to address the growing caseload ratios.

In addition to investing in Georgia's APS services, the Georgia General Assembly has targeted state dollars in other areas, too. FY 2016 included \$1.6 million for eight additional Georgia Bureau of Investigation agents. These agents are focused on elder abuse investigations and cases. Additionally, FY 2018 included over \$2 million in salary increases for staffers who monitor Georgia's nursing homes and are responsible for investigating complaints and reports. Furthermore, \$100,000 was added for a special prosecutor to assist in putting elder abusers in jail.



Elder Abuse Investigations



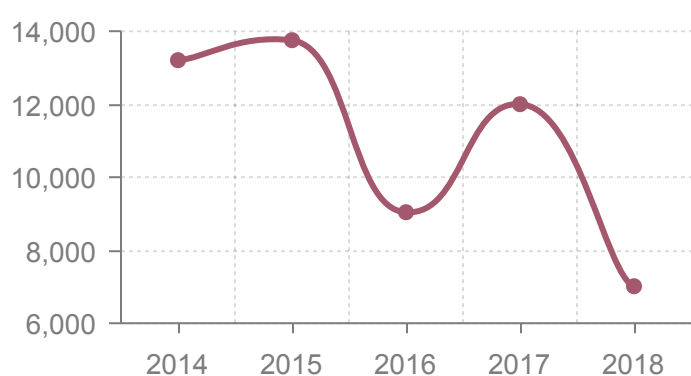
Meals on Wheels

Georgia has made tremendous investments in addressing hunger within Georgia's aging population. DAS has several nutrition and wellness initiatives, but congregate and home-delivered ("Meals on Wheels") meals have become a popular solution in addressing this issue. In FY 2009, the state general funds for home delivered and congregate meals was just over \$1 million. During the recession (FY 2010 to FY 2011) these funds were deferred due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant, which was part of the federal stimulus package. In FY 2012, when the ARRA grant expired, the General Assembly began to reinvest into Meals on Wheels. Since FY 2012, the Georgia General Assembly has increased the total state funds for home delivered and congregate meals to \$4.5 million. Most recently, FY 2020 added \$1.4 million for an additional 215,000 meals served, decreasing the waiting list from 2,700 to 2,035.

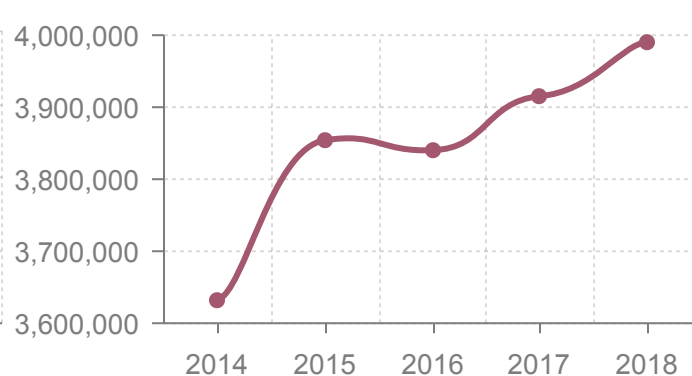
A 2015 study conducted by Brown University concluded that the Meals on Wheels service delivery model decreases feelings of isolation, loneliness, and rates of falls. These are all factors that contribute towards the increasing healthcare costs for the elderly and increasing demand for nursing home stays. Every \$100,000 in state dollars purchases over 15,000 meals, with each individual meal costing \$6.52. In order to clear out the waiting list in Georgia, an additional investment of \$4.3 million is needed. In comparison, the annual cost of one individual on the waiting list is \$2,114, while a nursing home stay for an entire year costs \$76,285 (Meals on Wheels America).

Meals on Wheels America estimates that of the nearly one million Georgians that make up the elder population, 16% are threatened by hunger, 9% are at risk of hunger, and 3% face hunger. Frequent in-home visits to bring meals provides unique opportunities for seniors to meet nutritional needs, combat social isolation, address safety hazards and provide holistic care. Additionally, several Meals on Wheels programs manage congregate meal sites, such as senior centers. Since about 22% of seniors in Georgia live alone, these meals, whether delivered or at a congregate meal site, serve as the only means of human interaction. Although consistent investments into these programs are positively impacting the waiting list, the growth of the aging population, along with the increasing costs of food and transportation, will continue to present a challenge.

Waiting List



Meals Served (Home Delivered and Congregate)



Resources

- For more information about available services in the home and community, like home-delivered and congregate meals, please find your nearest Area Agency at aging.georgia.gov/locations
- All persons are encouraged to report suspected abuse to protective services. If someone is in need of help, please call 9-1-1 or visit aging.georgia.gov/adult-protective-services-aps to report abuse
- Georgia Crisis and Access Line: 1-800-715-4225 for 24/7 mental health, substance abuse and emergency services
- For legal assistance over the telephone for Georgians 60 years of age and older, please contact the Senior Legal Hotline at 404-657-9915 or the Elderly Legal Assistance Program at 1-866-552-4464