



*Improving the Lives of Older Adults and People with Disabilities
Through Services, Research, and Education*

**Talking Points as Prepared for Delivery for the
First Ministerial Roundtable at the
UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing 2022 on
Ensuring Access to LTC and Support for Carers and Families
Delivered by Edwin L. Walker, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aging,
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Introduction:

- Good day, fellow colleagues.
- *First*, I wish to thank the conference organizers, UNECE; and our host country, Italy, for this opportunity, and your generous hospitality.
- *Second*, I must use this opportunity to reassert the full support of the United States for Ukraine, and in maintaining the territorial integrity of member States; and in the context of this conference, to question the impact of the current conflict on the lives of older people.
- *Third*, we, at the Administration for Community Living or ACL, play a critical role in advancing U.S. policies that impact older adults and people with disabilities.
- Our mission is to maximize the independence, well-being, health and dignity of older adults, people with disabilities across the lifespan, and their families and caregivers.
- We are one of the few federal agencies that has a mandate to be “visible and effective advocates” on behalf of the people and communities our programs serve.
- In the U.S., “community living” is viewed as not only an important policy goal, but it is fundamentally tied to our nation’s civil rights.
- We have a history of strong principles designed to focus on the rights and protections of older persons, and to develop systems to achieve quality care.

- Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted in stark terms throughout the globe, where additional protections are needed.
- Older individuals and people with disabilities were not only most at risk they were disproportionately impacted by severe complications and even death.
- As we review many of the causes, we see systemic and policy issues, but also, we see issues related to ageism and age discrimination that resulted in the violation of human rights, and other negative impacts on the lives of older people.
- So, more – actually, much more -- must be done. Ageism is pervasive and largely unaddressed, but I am pleased to indicate that ensuring all older persons live their lives with dignity, respect, and safety is a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration.

U.S. Policy Focus Areas Supporting Community Living

Long-Term Care Reform

- While we all desire a longer and more active life in older adulthood, this does not protect any of us from needing long-term care precipitated by illness, functional impairment or an accident.
- While only 4.5 percent of older adults in the U.S. reside in nursing facilities, we know older adults overwhelmingly desire to receive care at home and in their community.
- It is well-known that long-term care is largely provided by caregivers, with more than 1 in 5 people in the U.S. serving as a caregiver.
- Paid long-term care services and supports are financed by a variety of public and private sources, with 70% of funding coming from public sources. And at both the federal and state levels, the U.S. is working to create and fund innovative options and programs that provide non-medical services and assistance that support older adults and people with disabilities to be independent, to live where they want, with whom they want, and with full participation in their communities.

Nursing Home Diversion

- For far too long, we have seen people discharged from acute medical care, directly into a nursing, or other type of institutional facility.
- Proactive efforts are now being made to interrupt this pipeline by focusing on nursing home diversions, providing person-centered assessments and care, and revising payment policies, such as Money Follows the Person, to rebalance our long-term care system to be in greater alignment with people's desire to receive care at home.

- Most recently, President Biden announced a new effort to reform nursing home care, that includes: enhanced staffing requirements; stronger oversight; and a focus on greater quality.

Addressing the Workforce Shortage

- Successful aging in the community requires the availability of a well-trained, high-quality workforce of direct care professionals. Yet, like many countries, we are faced with challenges related to the supply of these workers, and the resulting impact on the health and safety of care recipients.
- Later this year, we will be establishing a new National Technical Assistance Center designed to address the issues and strengthen this critical workforce.

Supporting Families and Family Caregivers

- The home care providers, direct care professionals, and those often considered “formal”, or paid, caregivers are only the tip of the iceberg we call the Long-Term Services and Supports System.
- In the U.S., this system could not function without the considerable contributions of family and other unpaid caregivers.
- Right now, in the US, approximately 54 million individuals are in the role of being a family caregiver for an older adult, or a person of any age with a disability.
- Family caregivers provide an immense contribution, perform complex medical tasks with little guidance, and often do so at significant personal cost. For the past 22 years, we have established programs in each state to provide a full-range of support to approximately 900,000 caregivers a year. These caregivers indicate that without this support they would have had to place their loved one in some form of an institution or facility.
- Perhaps most exciting in this area is that later this year, the U.S. will be unveiling the nation’s first National Family Caregiving Strategy.
- The Strategy is the result of two citizen advisory councils of professionals, researchers, administrators, and caregivers themselves who provided an in-depth assessment and review of the leading and most promising research, policy and practice known—both domestically and globally, including from many of you.
- When complete the strategy will provide a roadmap for the United States to: optimize caregiver support efforts; advance equity and diversity; and ensure that all efforts to uplift caregivers are person- and family-centered, trauma informed, and culturally sensitive.

Wrap Up

- In conclusion, the United States remains committed to the goals of MIPAA. And we look forward to continued implementation through the periodic Reviews and Appraisals as well as other instruments or mechanisms developed to build *“A Sustainable World for All Ages.”*
- Thank you for your attention.