

For Minnesota seniors, more is at risk than Medicaid

by Emma Friend

The talk of the town is Medicaid, for good reason, too. While President Trump has said that [it won't get cut](#), others aren't sure that's possible in actuality. Fear is rampant that Minnesota older adults would be [hit harshly](#) by reductions to federal funding.

But more is at stake for seniors than just Medicaid. The Older Americans Act is a bi-partisan piece of legislation that gives \$21 million to Minnesota seniors via various agencies on aging who funnel it to community organizations. It was set to be re-authorized last December, but it wasn't, and its future [has since been uncertain](#).

Funding from this act goes to a variety of services, including transporting seniors to medical appointments, meal and grocery delivery (ever heard of Meals on Wheels?), help with chores like housekeeping, and more. These services make sure that even on low incomes, seniors can stay in the homes and communities they love.

For a time, I was a Household & Outdoor Maintenance Program Coordinator with Senior Community Services before entering the marketing side of the organization. My job was to set up seniors with free and low-cost lawn mowing. This kept them from paying the more expensive private companies or getting fined from their city for their grass being too long.

And yes, that does happen. I once spoke to a senior who said her city was going to send her a bill soon if her grass wasn't cut. The reason she hadn't dealt with it before? She was having vision problems and didn't even realize how long it had grown. *That will be several hundred dollars, please!* says the city.

95% of those using our Household & Outdoor Maintenance Program, which is partially funded by the Older Americans Act, said it helped them stay in their homes longer. Despite the proven impact of community services like ours, the act is still at risk.

Now, all this comes at a time when the funding landscape for aging services is already challenging. My colleague and Development Coordinator occasionally jokes that he feels like he's doing fundraising "on hard mode." It is difficult indeed to get enough money to meet the growing demand for our services when [less than 1% of all grant funding from major foundations goes to aging](#).

That's a problem that will soon be impossible to ignore. Already, [1 in 4 of Minnesotans are 60 or older](#). That's 25% of the population who need help with the things we will all need help with if we're lucky enough to grow old, like lawn mowing.

Someone will have to foot that bill, and it's not the low-income seniors relying on Social Security. So, either private foundations recognize the rapidly growing need for aging services (which seems unlikely), the state makes bigger investments (also unlikely, giving the predicted multi-billion deficit), or federal dollars need to remain flowing to the states to fund critical community services for seniors if we are to take care of them.

For those who choose to transition to assisted living, Medicaid should be there for them. But for those who can stay in their homes with just a little bit of help in the yard? I say we invest in prevention rather than banking on nursing homes as a cure.