



September 6, 2023

Subject: Expanding the Public Health Workforce ACL Award

To: Jay Hill, Director, Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health

Arkansas has been awarded \$628,878 to expand the public health workforce for the aging and disabled by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). This award was a result of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) which specifically provided funding to recruit, hire, and train public health workers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future public health challenges. The ACL has provided guidance on how the funding may be spent. The intent of the award, according to ACL, is to increase the number of public health professionals in the aging network. While aging providers would be delighted to expand its staff, there are concerns with accomplishing this with one-time funding. Furthermore, once divided among Arkansas' 145 senior citizens centers, the award is insufficient to cover the wages of a new hire.

Fortunately, the guidance does allow the award to be used to pay contractors. As Area Agencies on Aging, it is our core responsibility to assess the needs of aging Arkansans and develop plans to best assist this population. At present, the greatest demand we struggle to meet is for meals on wheels. There are many components to this program, but specifically, senior programs in our state would benefit from being able to hire more part-time staff, expand the hours of current staff or hire temporary contractors to support meal delivery to our home-bound seniors. It is our view that meal delivery not only addresses the public health issues of food insecurity but also keeps vulnerable people safely in their homes to avoid the spread of disease.

The desire of Arkansas Area Agencies on Aging to use the award from ACL for the purpose of expanding staff support, including but not limited to drivers and kitchen staff for meals on wheels. To avoid misuse of federal funding, it is important that ACL provide written permission to that effect. Upon approval, we respectfully request that we be allowed to use the award in this manner.

Respectfully,

Brad Bailey, President
Arkansas Area Agencies on Aging