

The Administration for Community Living

Advancing independence, integration, and inclusion for all people, throughout life

What we do and why we do it

ACL was created around the fundamental principle that all people, regardless of age or disability, should be able to live where they choose, with the people they choose, and fully participate in their communities. By advocating across the federal government for older adults, people with disabilities, and families and caregivers; funding services and supports provided by primarily by networks of community-based organizations; and investing in training, education, research and innovation, ACL helps make this principle a reality for millions of Americans.

ACL Today: A snapshot

ACL was initially established in April 2012, bringing together federal advocacy for older adults and people with disabilities, along with most federal human services programs for older adults and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, missions previously housed in multiple organizations across the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Our portfolio has grown significantly in the years since with the transfer of programs from other agencies to ACL. These additions include a research institute; independent living, assistive technology, and traumatic brain injury programs; paralysis and limb-loss resource centers; and programs that help people navigate their Medicare benefits and the health system.

Today, ACL's budget is just over \$2 billion, and the agency awards several thousand grants and contracts to help people of all ages live independently in their communities.

This work has never been more important. There are 65 million people age 60 and older. All but a tiny percentage of them live in non-institutional settings, as do nearly 57 million people with disabilities. Both populations are growing, and older Americans are one of the fastest-growing demographics in the country; by 2020, there will be more than 77 million people over the age of 60.

Bringing aging and disability work together to better serve both

Bringing together aging and disability work has worked remarkably well. Stakeholders embraced the concept and committed to making it successful. Less than five years later, feedback from our networks is overwhelmingly supportive. These communities are increasingly coming together at the state and local levels, and ACL is frequently asked for help in forging these new collaborative relationships.

There are a lot of similarities in the services and supports older adults and people with disabilities need in order to live independently. As one agency, we are able to leverage learnings and best practices for meeting those similar needs. Further, the disability and aging communities together have a larger voice, and ultimately are more successful advocates, than either community on its own. At the same time neither network loses the unique elements of their individual missions. There are issues that affect both people with disabilities and older adults, and we join forces to address them. But there also are issues that affect only older adults, or only people with disabilities, and ACL continues to develop and manage programs, and advocate for the two populations individually, as well.

A person-centered approach

ACL believes that every person has the right to make choices and to control the decisions in their lives. This right to self-determination includes decisions about where to live, decisions about work, and all the other daily decisions most adults make without a second thought.

Many older adults and people with disabilities need help with the daily tasks of life. For some people this is physical help, like help with dressing and eating. For others, it is help with making decisions and planning. Still others require a blend of supports. Each person is unique, and the help they may need is as well. We believe that the preferences and needs of older adults and people with disabilities who need assistance belong at the center of the system of services and supports that enable them to live the lives they want to live. We further believe that those needs and preferences should be defined by the individual receiving services and supports.

At the same time, ACL recognizes that some people with disabilities and some older adults experience challenges in understanding and communicating their preferences and needs, and family members and caregivers often play a critical role in ensuring that those preferences are honored and needs are met.

We also recognize that the preferences of the individual are not the only factor in determining how to best support that person. The availability of services and supports in a variety of settings, the resources and availability of family caregivers, and other factors also must be considered.

Protecting rights and preventing abuse

All people have the right to live their lives with dignity and respect, free from abuse of any kind. Unfortunately, far too many older adults and people with disabilities are abused, neglected or exploited. ACL is committed to developing systems and programs that prevent abuse from happening, protecting people from abusive situations, and supporting people who have experienced abuse to help them recover.

Supporting people where they want to live

ACL believes that home- and community-based services and supports should be robust enough that individuals with even the most complex medical and behavioral needs can be appropriately and effectively supported in their own home or other community-based settings. We know this is possible – it has been demonstrated in many communities.

Therefore, ACL advocates for the continued expansion and coordination of home- and community-based services and improvements in quality so that older adults and people with disabilities have more and better options about how and where to receive the long-term services and supports they need.