

House Human Services Testimony
Meg Burmeister, Executive Director, Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging
January 8, 2026

My name is Meg Burmeister, I am the Executive Director Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging. I am here testifying on behalf of the 5 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). I would like to take a moment to let you know that, previously, the AAAs were part of the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging (V4A). This year, we have transformed our organizational structure and are now part of the Vermont Aging Network Consortium (VANC). We provide the same services, just under a different umbrella.

Budget Adjustment Act Request

Last session, the Legislature appropriated funding for a 2% Medicaid rate increase. Representative Yacovone spearheaded this effort in the House Appropriations Committee. His intent (and we believe the committee's understanding) was the AAA case management would be included. However, DAIL had not budgeted for AAA case management, so was excluded from the 2% increase. ***We are requesting that funding be added to the BAA to cover this 2% increase.*** This increase is necessary to maintain the quality of services that the HCBS system relies on.

Throughout the last two years, the role of Case Management has undergone a significant change in response to a federal rule that imparts Conflict Free Case Management. For the 5 Area Agencies on Aging this meant a significant effort to scale up to a dramatic shift in volume of work (doubled) and staffing needed; all while supporting frail elders in the community who choose to remain in their homes for the long-term care needs. This shift results in financial stressors for the AAA network.

As workforce stability is crucial in this work, we are continually seeing a lack of funding to meet the workforce demands that we are confronted with. The funding has not kept up with the increase in the cost of doing business - and doing it well. The demands of these changes present us with more complex clients who are presenting with greater frailty, multiple health conditions, and increased need for coordination and advocacy.

In a system where health care costs are exceptionally high, the work of the HCBS Case Management by the AAA network plays an important preventative role. By supporting older people to navigate care systems and remain safely at home, these services help delay entry into residential care and reduce avoidable hospital admissions. This represents a cost-effective investment compared to higher-cost downstream services.

Because legislative intent was to include AAA case management in the 2% increase, we are asking the Legislature to support this BAA request.

Other Legislative Priorities

- Request an additional \$2 million in base general funds for home-delivered meals for older Vermonters, including the option to draw down additional matching funds through the global commitment investment

- Support for reforms to make healthcare more affordable for Vermonters, including strengthening home and community-based services such as Choices for Care case management, home health, Wheels on Meals, and skilled nursing and enhanced residential care services.
- Support for an upcoming bill to appropriate \$500,000 to the Dementia Respite Grant program, administered by the Area Agencies on Aging, to serve more unpaid caregivers of loved ones with dementia.
- Support for consumer privacy protections consistent with what the Senate passed in S.71.
- Support for Hunger Free VT advocacy for improving access to SNAP outreach services for Vermonters, including 60+, disabled, and homeless Vermonters, and improving benefits navigational services for eligible Vermonters in light of federal actions.
- Support for reforms to reduce the cost of health insurance premiums for employers and employees.
- Support for the full implementation of long-term care pay rate studies
- Support for the homeshare network as a source of relief for elders wanting to remain in their homes.