

Heart of Texas Area Plan

FFY 2027 - 2029

As Required by the Older Americans Act, As Amended in 2020: Section 306, Area Plans

**Pending Approval by HHSC
Office of Area Agencies on Aging May 2026**

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Executive Summary

The Area Agency on Aging of the Heart of Texas (AAAHOT) is administered by the Heart of Texas Council of Governments (HOTCOG) and provides services & support to persons aged 60 years and over, and their family caregivers. HOTCOG also administers the region's Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and 2-1-1 units, creating a synergy between the programs that benefits the residents of the service area. HOTCOG's programs serve Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone and McLennan Counties; this region is officially designated as Planning and Service Area 11 "The Heart of Texas" by the Texas Health & Human Services Committee (THHSC). The six-county service area is predominantly rural, while the Waco Metropolitan Statistical Area (Waco MSA) in central McLennan County is fully urbanized and has the highest population density in the region by far.

AAAHOT provides a mix of direct and partnered services in pursuit of fulfilling its OAA mandate to be the primary regional nexus for aging network services. Some of AAAHOT's direct services include Evidence-Based Intervention classes (such as A Matter of Balance, REACH, and StressBusting), and legal services to seniors such as benefits counseling and the Senior Medicare Patrol program. AAAHOT works with service providers for programs such as residential repair, personal assistance, homemaker, caregiver respite, and medical equipment.

This Area Plan was developed after a comprehensive review of Needs Assessments produced by partner organizations throughout the region as well as HOTCOG's own data resources. Based on that analysis, we identified issues facing our senior population and their family caregivers, with similar outcomes to the findings of the previous Area Plan. Access to health care, transportation, in-home services, and nutrition were again major factors identified across the service area, among other issues raised by local seniors and the organizations providing services to them.

This plan will provide a roadmap for how AAAHOT, under the oversight of THHSC via the Office of Area Agencies on Aging (OAAA), will not only continue to provide

excellent service to the seniors living in the Heart of Texas but will also expand and innovate services to better serve our clients in all five factors. The development of this plan involved not only assessing the current needs of the service area, but also using data provided by THHSC in conjunction with US Census data to project what service needs AAAHOT will face in the future.

The OAA mandates that Area Agencies on Aging prioritize seniors who may face the greatest economic and greatest social needs. These include individuals who meet one or more of the following criteria: rural, low-income, and disabled. Many seniors in AAAHOT's service area fall into several or all of these categories, and demographic projections indicate that the trend will only intensify over the next decade. This plan outlines how AAAHOT will improve outreach to these seniors in relation to the five factors listed above.

We recognize and accept the fact that we cannot provide all services to every older adult simply because they have identified a need or asked for a service - there are limits to funding. Regardless, we are committed to serving as many as possible of the persons aged 60 and over, persons with disabilities, and their family caregivers who live in our service area. We do so by utilizing our skills, knowledge, financial resources, contacts, relationships, partnerships, and experience to the best of our ability.

Mission

The Mission of the Health and Human Services Division of the Heart of Texas Council of Governments is a commitment to improving the quality of life for those whom the Health and Human Services Division serves that are in greatest need by: providing advocacy, assistance and access to services; developing a comprehensive continuum of care; and empowering those in greatest need, regardless of location, national origin, religion or disability.

Vision

The Vision of the Health and Human Services Division of the Heart of Texas Council of Governments is to enhance the development of a comprehensive and coordinated

system of health and human services within the planning and service area for those whom the Health and Human Services Division serves

Organizational Profile

Reference: [45 CFR 1321.57](#), [45 CFR 1321.63](#), & [45 CFR 1321.65\(b\)\(2\)](#)

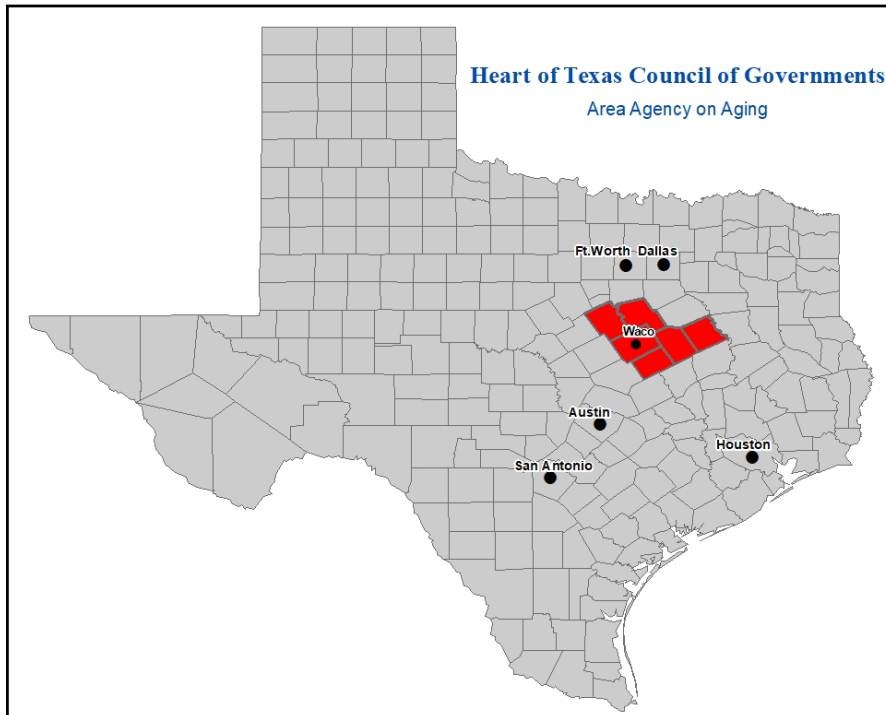
Organization and Staff Composition

AAAHOT is a program of the Heart of Texas Council of Governments (HOTCOG). HOTCOG was originally established in 1966 after the State of Texas passed the Regional Planning Act of 1965, which created 24 statewide planning regions each comprised of a voluntary association of local governments. The Texas Legislature designated these collaborative organizations as “councils of governments.” They are charged with addressing regional issues and opportunities and are reviewed biennially by the Governor of Texas. COGs are political subdivisions of the State of Texas and are local non-governmental entities that serve as voluntary associations of municipalities and local governments.

HOTCOG has operated AAAHOT for nearly sixty years, with an exemplary performance record: there has never been a single major finding against HOTCOG in over five decades of federal monitoring and state oversight. AAAHOT’s current staff is composed of six full-time employees. Collectively, AAAHOT and the Heart of Texas 2-1-1 Area Information Center, the Heart of Texas Aging & Disability Resource Center, and the Heart of Texas Rural Transportation District, make up HOTCOG’s Health & Human Services Division.

AAAHOT’s team is on the smaller side of the spectrum compared to COGs around the state but prides itself on leveraging the close working relationships and shared expertise of our staff to provide a high level of responsive service to the residents of the Heart of Texas. Our longest tenured employee has served our region at AAAHOT for over 20 years, and our combined tenure is over sixty years of service, knowledge and experience. We proudly and gladly serve the seniors of the Heart of Texas.

The Heart of Texas - Planning and Service Area 11 (PSA-11)



The Heart of Texas region encompasses the whole of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone and McLennan Counties. Administered by HOTCOG, "Heart of Texas" is the official designation for the region. There are 24 Planning & Service Areas (PSA) in Texas. The Heart of Texas is officially numbered as PSA-11 by the Texas Health & Human Services Committee (THHSC). The HOTCOG PSA consists of 5,527 square miles and is located approximately halfway between Dallas and Austin roughly centered on the Interstate 35 corridor, residing in the northern portion of the Central Texas region as labelled by the Texas Comptroller.

The region takes its name in part from its shape on a map and in part from the figurative symmetry between its geographic location within the state and the position of the heart within the human body. It is also called the Heart of Texas because it is home to some of the oldest settlements in Texas, situated in an ecologically diverse landscape. Along with the historic city of Waco, the primarily

rural communities of the Heart of Texas share a rich history across a variegated countryside that spans the borderlands of the Crosstimbers, Blackland Prairie, and Post Oak Savannah ecological regions.

In accordance with the guidance of the TSHHC's Office of Area Agencies on Aging, AAAHOT prioritizes those seniors in our region who have the greatest economic needs as well as those with the greatest social needs.

AAAHOT defines Greatest Economic Need (GEN) as the lack sufficient financial resources to consistently afford basic necessities such as food, medication, housing, or transportation, and may also face barriers related to rural living, limited English proficiency, or access to services.

AAAHOT defines Greatest Social Need (GSN) as those who seniors are frail, homebound, or socially isolated due to illness, disability, or cognitive impairment. Individuals are considered homebound if they cannot leave their home without assistance, and frail if they are functionally impaired and require substantial help with daily activities or supervision for health and safety reasons

We have seniors facing GEN and/or GSN in every single county and community in the Heart of Texas. While some zip codes are assumed to be more affluent than others, the reality is that there are seniors in crisis across our rural region.

of Waco. The primary highway systems in Falls County are State Highway 6 running north and south, US Hwy 77 running north and south, and State Hwy 7 running east and west. Rosebud, Lott and Golinda are small communities connected by Hwy 77. The area is heavily agrarian, with most of the county's land area used for pasture and cultivated crops.

Freestone County is the eastern-most county of the HOTCOG PSA, contiguous with Limestone County to the West; the Trinity River serves as Freestone County's eastern border. Established in 1850, the land area of the county is 892 square miles covered almost entirely by the Post Oak Savannah ecoregion, with a borderland on the Blackland Prairie ecoregion in the northwestern corner. It ranks 5th in size of the six counties. Fairfield is the county seat with other major communities of Teague, Wortham, Kirvin, and Streetman. The highway system includes IH 45 running north/south, and US 84 running east/west with a small segment of State Hwy 164 running east/west in the southern portion of the county. Freestone County is primarily a livestock county with limited row-crop farming, along with some drilling of natural gas and mining of coal.

Hill County is in the northern portion of the HOTCOG PSA, contiguous with McLennan County directly to its south, and shares the Brazos River as a border with Bosque County to its west. Established in 1852, Hill County is the 3rd largest of the six counties, with 958 square miles of borderland between the Crosstimbers and Blackland Prairies ecoregions. It is the second most populous county in the HOTCOG PSA. Interstate Hwy 35 runs north and south with IH 35 splitting into a "Y" north of Hillsboro with IH 35 W going to Ft. Worth and IH 35 E going to Dallas. State Hwy 174 diagonally crosses the county from northwest to southeast and SH 22 crosses the county from east to west. Hillsboro is the county seat and is located at the intersection of IH 35, SH 22, and SH 171. SH 31 crosses the southeastern portion of the county traveling southwest to northeast. Hillsboro is the largest city in the county with many smaller communities including Whitney, Aquilla, Abbott, Penelope, Hubbard, Mt Calm, Malone, Bynum, Mertens, Carl's Corner, Itasca, Covington, and Blum. This rural county is primarily agricultural and light industry.

Limestone County is in the southeastern portion of the HOTCOG PSA, contiguous with McLennan and Falls counties to the West, and Freestone County to the east. Established in April 1846, Limestone County covers 933 square miles of borderland between the Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie ecoregions. The county seat is Groesbeck and is the second largest in population behind Mexia. SH 14 runs north and south, SH 164 and US 84 run east and west with SH 171 traversing the northern part of Limestone County east to west. Mexia is the largest populated town in Limestone County with the smaller communities of Kosse, Thornton, Tehuacana and Coolidge. The county is largely made up of farming and ranching communities but is also home to the largest power plant located in the HOTCOG PSA.

McLennan County is in the western central portion of the HOTCOG PSA, contiguous with Bosque to the northeast, Hill to the north/northeast, Limestone to the west/northwest, and Falls to the south. Established January 1850, the county includes 1,037 square miles of borderland between the Crosstimbers and Blackland Prairie ecoregions. It is the largest of the six counties both in land area and in population. Roughly 40% of the land area is classified as urban; the county seat of McLennan County is Waco which takes up the central part of the county. The Waco Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) contains the highest population density within the entire six-county HOTCOG PSA and includes Waco, Lacy Lakeview, Bellmead, Beverly Hills, Woodway, Robinson, and Hewitt. The Waco MSA is home to industries of various types. McLennan County is also home to vibrant rural communities outside of the Waco MSA including Crawford, McGregor, Moody, Bruceville-Eddy, Lorena, Hallsburg, Riesel, Mart, Elm Mott, Leroy, West, Ross, and Gholson. These rural communities are involved in raising crops, dairy, and ranching operations.

Our region has experienced rapid growth, but most of that growth has been in younger age groups: the percentage of adults aging into the senior population is projected to shrink over the next decade, while the percentage of seniors aging into the 85+ cohort will be projected to grow during that same period. This means that the total levels of both GSN and GEN are likely to rise amongst our most at risk seniors in that eldest group.

In order to help address the needs and concerns of our senior population, AAAHOT maintains an advisory council to support its efforts across the region. The Health and Human Services Advisory Council (HHSAC) is a voluntary group of citizens appointed by the HOTCOG Executive Committee to serve in an advisory capacity to the Health and Human Services Division.

Membership includes individuals representing the needs of health and human service consumers including older persons, minority individuals, persons with disabilities, caregivers, advocates for health and human service provider organizations, advocates for transportation provider organizations, advocates for support service organizations, local elected officials, the general public and persons with leadership experience.

The HHSAC has twenty-five voting seats for county representatives (three from Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill and Limestone Counties and ten from McLennan County and the currently active Texas Silver Haired Legislators) and has no limits on the number of non-voting members.

Voting membership on the HHSAC includes elected Texas Silver Haired Legislators (TSHL) representing the HOTCOG service area. In addition to voting members identified above, Resource Representatives are asked to serve because of their special knowledge or experience in health and human service policies and issues. Resource Representatives serving in this capacity may be from within or outside the HOTCOG service area and may include representatives from agencies receiving funds from HOTCOG.

The voting HHSAC members from each county are nominated by the County Judge of that county and are appointed by the HOTCOG's Executive Committee to represent the needs of health and human service consumers in the six counties of the Heart of Texas region served by HOTCOG. Members shall serve terms as described in the By- Laws for the HHSAC subject to the authority of the Executive Committee to remove a committee member at its discretion. Members should be able to look beyond local interests to regional issues, be supportive of appropriate approaches to addressing

health and human service needs and have enough time to attend meetings of the Council. Terms of membership for voting members on the HHSAC will be three (3) years with not more than 33% of the voting member's terms from any county expiring in a single calendar year.

This results in a turnover of not more than 1/3 of the membership in any one year. In most years there is no turnover at all because of the length of terms. Voting members may serve three (3) consecutive terms, if approved, and may return to the HHSAC after waiting one (1) year after completion of the third consecutive term.

Elected Texas Silver Haired Legislators and appointed Resource Representatives (non-voting) are exempt from HHSAC term limits. Resource Representatives do not require an appointment by one of the County Judges. They can be asked to serve by the Director of Health & Human Services because they do not represent any county and effectively represent an industry, constituency or segment of the community.

Stewardship & Oversight

Reference: [OAA of 1965, as amended through P.L. 116-131 \(3/25/2020\), & \[45 CFR 1321.59\]\(#\)](#)

Program Management, Administrative Activities, and Stewardship of OAA Funds

The Heart of Texas Area Agency on Aging (AAA) maintains a comprehensive framework of program management and administrative activities designed to ensure full compliance with the **Older Americans Act** (OAA) and **45 CFR 1321.59**, which requires the development and implementation of written policies and procedures governing all aspects of AAA operations. These efforts support effective service delivery, accountability, and responsible stewardship of federal and state resources.

[Written Policies and Procedures \(45 CFR 1321.59 Compliance\)](#)

In accordance with 45 CFR 1321.59, the AAA has established and maintains formal, written policies and procedures that guide all major functional areas, including:

- Program operations and service delivery standards
- Fiscal management and internal controls
- Data collection, reporting, confidentiality, and record retention
- Monitoring and oversight of contractors and service providers
- Staff training and personnel practices
- Communication protocols and stakeholder engagement

These policies are reviewed on a regular basis and updated as needed to reflect changes in federal and state regulations, including guidance from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The AAA ensures that policies are consistently implemented, accessible to staff and contractors, and used as the basis for operational decision-making and oversight.

Fiscal Oversight and Internal Controls

Consistent with OAA requirements and 45 CFR 1321.59, the AAA has implemented fiscal policies and procedures that ensure proper stewardship and accountability of funds. These include:

- Clearly defined internal controls, including segregation of duties
- Procedures for budget development, approval, and monitoring
- Cost allocation methodologies consistent with federal cost principles
- Expenditure tracking and reconciliation processes
- Preparation for and compliance with independent audits

The AAA conducts fiscal monitoring of contracted providers, including desk reviews and on-site assessments, to verify compliance with contractual requirements and allowable cost standards. When deficiencies are identified, corrective action plans and technical assistance are provided to ensure resolution and continuous improvement.

Program Oversight and Monitoring

The AAA has established procedures for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of service providers and programs, as required under 45 CFR 1321.59. These activities include:

- Routine review of performance data and service utilization
- On-site monitoring visits
- Evaluation of compliance with service standards and contractual obligations
- Documentation of findings and implementation of corrective actions when needed

These oversight activities ensure that services are delivered in alignment with OAA priorities, including targeting individuals with the greatest economic and social need.

Data Management, Reporting, and Confidentiality

The AAA maintains policies and procedures for data collection, validation, reporting, and confidentiality, ensuring compliance with state and federal requirements. Staff and providers are trained in the use of state-approved data systems to ensure:

- Accurate and timely reporting of units of service and expenditures
- Protection of personally identifiable information
- Adherence to record retention requirements
- Use of data to support program planning, evaluation, and quality improvement

Data is routinely analyzed to assess program performance, identify service gaps, and guide resource allocation decisions consistent with OAA goals.

Training and Technical Assistance

To support the implementation of established policies and procedures, the AAA provides ongoing training and technical staff assistance and contractors. Training ensures consistent understanding and application of:

- OAA requirements and priorities
- AAA policies and procedures
- Fiscal accountability standards
- Person-centered service delivery and cultural competency

Technical assistance is tailored based on monitoring results and identified needs, supporting provider capacity and compliance.

Communication and Coordination

The AAA maintains structured communication processes to ensure policies and procedures are effectively disseminated and understood. This includes:

- Regular provider meetings and guidance updates
- Written policies and procedural guidance
- Coordination with advisory councils, community partners, and HHSC

These efforts promote transparency, consistency, and alignment across the aging services network.

Alignment with OAA Principles

All program management and administrative activities are grounded in the core principles of the OAA and reinforced through compliance with 45 CFR 1321.59, including:

- Promoting independence, dignity, and choice for older adults
- Prioritizing services to those with the greatest economic and social need
- Ensuring a coordinated, community-based system of care
- Maintaining accountability, transparency, and responsible use of public funds

Through the development, implementation, and continuous refinement of written policies and procedures, the AAA demonstrates strong stewardship and oversight of OAA resources while ensuring programs are compliant, effective, and responsive to the needs of older adults and caregivers in the region.

Key Topic Areas

Reference: [45 CFR 1321.65\(b\)\(5\)](#), [45 CFR 1321.65\(b\)\(2\)](#), & [45 CFR 1321.65\(c\)](#)

AAA continues to embrace the following guiding principles for Service Delivery:

- Consumer Focus – The individual needs, preferences, and rights of the consumer are primary to the design, development, and implementation of all programs and service delivery systems.
- Consumer Choice – Consumers have access to, and information about, a complete array of aging & disability services, supports, and opportunities when entering the HHSC system to make informed decisions.
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- Accessibility – Consumers must be able to access services easily within the local community.
- Dignity, Well-Being and Safety – Service provision/processes must promote and enhance individual dignity, well-being, and safety of the consumer.
- Teamwork and Partnerships – The AAA performs a critical role in providing information and support services to older adults and coordination and collaboration between consumers, advocates, elected officials, state and federal agencies, and the public to achieve positive results.
- Local Participation – Service provision/processes must recognize that local participation in the service delivery system can increase the quality of care provided to the older individuals residing in the State of Texas.
- Provider Accountability – The goal is to achieve consistency in available services, recognizing regional differences in consumer needs and best practices in the local delivery system.
- Realistic Service Delivery Methodologies – Service delivery systems/processes must be realistic, cost-effective, and achievable.
- Best Business Decision – Identify and evaluate all available options to achieve the best business decisions. This will require balancing

consumer priorities, best practices, standards of excellence, and budgetary constraints.

- Respect – Staff will honor the opinions, values, dignity, privacy, and individuality of each other as well as the older individuals, their families, and/or caregivers served in the State of Texas.

Core Program Area 1: Supportive Services

Definition

Supportive services are a broad category of community-based services authorized under Title III-B of the Older Americans Act (OAA). These services are intended to help older adults maintain independence and age safely in their homes and communities, reduce isolation, and prevent or delay institutionalization.

Authorized under the Older Americans Act (OAA), these services address functional limitations, economic barriers, and gaps in access to care that may otherwise place older adults at risk of institutionalization.

Service Provision

The AAA provides supportive services throughout its six-county region through a combination of direct service delivery and partnerships with community-based providers. Services are available to individuals age 60 and older, as well as eligible caregivers. Priority is given to individuals with the greatest economic and social needs, including low-income older adults, individuals living in rural areas, minorities, and persons with limited English proficiency.

The AAA is 1 of 28 designated Area Agencies on Aging by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to provide advocacy, access and assistance to eligible clients. The AAA serves a six-county region which includes Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone and McLennan counties.

AAA directly administers the following supportive programs:

- Information, Referral & Assistance
- Care Coordination, including in-home care services
- Transportation
- Outreach

Information, Referral & Assistance Program

Individuals contacting the AAA inquiring about services begin the process of assistance, which involves assessing the needs of the inquirer, evaluating appropriate resources, assessing appropriate response modes, identifying organizations capable of meeting those needs, and providing information about the organizations to help the inquirer make an informed choice.

Care Coordination Program

The Care Coordination program empowers senior citizens age 60 and older to maintain their independence, freedom, and dignity by identifying needs and arranging social services required for living independently.

Services are provided utilizing a case manager who assesses the social service needs of clients aged 60 and older and the caregiver (if applicable) to plan, arrange, coordinate, and follow up on needed services.

Services that can be provided for the care recipient (no caregiver involved) are in-home care services such as personal assistance and homemaker, minor home repairs/modifications, and health maintenance.

- Personal Assistance - Assistance which may include bathing, dressing, toileting, transfer, light house cleaning, and meal preparation.
- Homemaker - Assistance which includes light house cleaning, meal preparation, and shopping.

- Home Repair/Modification – Repairs and modifications that improve accessibility, structure, safety, and weatherization of the home for low-income homeowners age 60 and older who are living in unsafe and/or unhealthy environments.
- Health Maintenance – Assistive devices (glasses, dentures, hearing aids, etc.) and durable medical equipment that enable the client to be more independent and assist them with their activities of daily living.

Transportation

Assist in expanding awareness of the Heart of Texas Rural Transit District's Blue Bus Campaign.

Where Can Blue Take You? Providing safe, reliable, and friendly transit services to everyone in the rural areas within the Heart of Texas region.

<https://www.gobluetransit.com/>

Ensure all AAA staff, volunteers, subrecipients, and contractors who provide services directly to older adults and their family members or caregivers receive training and education of the availability of rural and public transportation, knowledge of accessible and assisted transportation services for older individuals.

Provide awareness campaigns with extensive outreach among the urban and rural counties, aging network, hospitals, clinics, social security, health care providers, nutrition providers, and churches, to provide community resources for rural and public transportation services, the availability of volunteer and private transportation programs, and knowledge of accessible and assisted transportation services for older individuals.

Outreach

Outreach provides interactions throughout the HOTCOG region identifying potential participants or their caregivers to encourage them to use AAA services and benefits.

AAAHOT partners with multiple social services, In-Home Care agencies, Agri Life Extension, Hospitals, Clinics, state and local agencies throughout our six-county region. These partnerships help reach the people of the community plus the agencies learn each other's programs and share client referrals

Core Program Area 2: Nutrition Services

Congregate Meals, Grab & Go Meals, and Home Delivered Meals

Definition

Nutrition Services help reduce hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition while promoting health, independence, and social engagement among older adults. Meals provided through these programs meet federal nutrition standards, including providing at least one-third (33 $\frac{1}{3}$ %) of the Dietary Reference Intake and complying with the most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The AAA delivers nutrition services through contracts with regional providers, including Meals on Wheels Waco Texas, Bosque County Senior Services, Freestone County Senior Services, and Limestone County Senior Services Project.

A. Congregate Meals

Service Description

Congregate Meals provide hot, nutritionally balanced meals to eligible older adults at senior centers and community meal sites throughout the Heart of Texas Region. Qualified nutrition professionals plan meals and meet federal dietary standards.

Beyond addressing nutritional needs, congregate meal sites serve as important community hubs that promote socialization, reduce isolation, and provide opportunities for health education, outreach, and evidence-based wellness activities. Participation in congregate meal programs helps support the physical, emotional, and social well-being of older adults.

Congregate meal sites are located throughout the region, covering each of the six counties.

B. Home Delivered Meals

Service Description

Home Delivered Meals provide nutritious meals to eligible homebound older adults who are unable to attend congregate meal sites due to illness, disability, or frailty. Meals are delivered directly to participants' homes and meet federal nutrition requirements.

In addition to providing nutrition, meal delivery personnel serve as a regular point of contact for participants and may identify potential health or safety concerns.

Program benefits include:

- Routine wellness checks
- Monitoring for changes in health or living conditions
- Referrals to additional supportive services when needed

Priority is given to individuals with the greatest economic and social needs, including rural residents, isolated individuals, and older adults at risk of malnutrition. Nutrition education materials are also distributed to support healthy aging and nutrition management.

Focal Points

The Older Americans Act considers focal points to be facilities established to encourage the maximum collocation and coordination of services for older adults. AAAHOT's office is located at 1514 South New Road in the HOTCOG Building in Waco, Texas. The AAA office is the main focal point. AAAHOT has designated its nutrition provider's Senior Centers as focal points. The nutrition providers assist the AAA in the delivery of services to clients in their specific county.

It is recognized that the Senior Centers and operations of the nutrition providers in the county are the best and most opportune location to access and serve clients residing in the specific county. The AAA works closely with the nutrition providers and the combined efforts of both result in a better and more effective delivery of services.

Focal Points

Table 3. Focal Points in the Planning and Service Area

Community Served	Name and Address of Focal Point	Services Provided	Services Coordinated with Other Agencies
PSA 11 AAHOT Region: Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan counties.	Heart of Texas Council of Gov Area Agency on Aging of the Heart of Texas. 1514 South New Road Waco, TX 76711. Phone 254-292-1800	Information, Referral & Assistance ; Benefits Counseling; Care Coordination including in-home care services, Residential Repair and Health Maintenance - Assistive Devices; Caregiver Support Coordination including in-home care services, Residential Repair and Health Maintenance - Assistive Devices; Evidence-Based Health Education Classes; Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Outreach; and Nutrition programs.	Transportation Services with HOTCOG's Rural Transit District, Disability services with ADRC, DSHS, 211, Behavioral Health and IDD services, Alzheimer's Disease Dementia Support Groups, Cancer Support Groups, Stroke Support Groups, Hospital care, Social Security, Independent Living Centers, Long Term Care applications, Community Based Services, Workforce Solutions, and the local HHSC for Long Term Care Services and Support.
PSA 11 AAHOT Region: Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan counties.	Agencies in each county are places where the community go for information regarding services in their counties. We don't claim these as Focal Points; however, they are partners assisting the communities in each county. To name a few: Workforce Solutions, County Judges Offices, HHSC local offices,	Community Resource Guide distribution and referrals to the AAA and ADRC. Link to Heart of Texas Community Resource Guide https://issuu.com/harold.ferguson/docs/hot-resourceguide22-web	Transportation Services with HOTCOG's Rural Transit District, Disability services with ADRC, DSHS, 211, Behavioral Health and IDD services, Alzheimer's Disease Dementia Support Groups, Cancer Support Groups, Stroke Support Groups, Hospital care, Social Security, Independent Living Centers,

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Heart of Texas AAA – HHSC approval: 12/08/2023

Core Program Area 3: Evidence-Based Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Definition

Evidence-based health promotion programs are designed to help older adults prevent or better manage chronic conditions, reduce fall risk, and improve overall quality of life. These programs are based on nationally recognized models with demonstrated health outcomes.

Programs offered within the Heart of Texas region include:

- A Matter of Balance – managing falls and preventing the risk of falling
- Caregiver Stress Busting – dealing with caregiver stress concerning chronic-related illnesses
- Caregiver Stress Busting – dealing with caregiver stress concerning Alzheimer’s or related dementia illness
- Reach-TX – personalized individual program to manage your health and well-being in caring for Alzheimer’s diseases or related dementia.

The classes are offered to age 60 and older individuals and their caregivers.

The programs test models or interventions with practical applications that provide proven health benefits to participants. Each of the programs contributes to a network of strong community programming specifically designed for seniors and their caregivers to help them retain or regain better health conditions. Reach-TX is a personalized program for individuals as compared to A Matter of Balance and the two Caregiver Stress Busting classes which are group classes.

Core Program Area 4: Family Caregiver Support Services

Definition

The Caregiver Support Coordination program empowers senior citizens age 60 and older to maintain their independence, freedom, and dignity by identifying needs and arranging social services required for living independently, specifically through the utilization of a caregiver who can be a family member or non-family member.

Services are provided utilizing a case manager who assesses the social service needs when a family caregiver or other caregiver is involved to plan, arrange,

coordinate, and follow up on services exclusively for the caregiver in support of the care recipient who is age 60 and older.

Services that can be provided when a caregiver is involved are home repair/modification, health maintenance, and in-home care, such as respite for the caregiver.

- Home Repair/Modification – Repairs and modifications to homes that improve accessibility, structure, safety, and weatherization of the home where a low-income care recipient age 60 and older is living in unsafe and/or unhealthy environments.
- Health Maintenance - Durable medical equipment that enables the age 60 and older client to be more independent and assists them with their activities of daily living. Services provided included vision, dental, and hearing assistance.
- Respite - Short-term relief for caregivers that is provided in the client’s home environment temporarily while the caregiver is unavailable or needs relief. The service allows the caregiver to take care of themselves, so they are better able to sustain care for their elderly client or loved one over an extended period.

Efforts continue to expand caregiver support services and respite availability in rural communities.

Core Program Area 5: Legal Assistance

Definition

Legal Assistance programs help protect the rights, financial security, and benefits of older adults.

Services include assistance with:

- Public benefits and entitlement programs
- Medicare and Medicaid appeals

- Social Security benefits
- Insurance and medical billing issues
- Consumer protection and fraud prevention

The Benefits Counseling program primarily provides financial-related assistance and Medicare/Medicaid-related help to clients through Legal Assistance (one-on-one) and Legal Awareness (groups) events.

Legal Assistance - Provides individualized "one-on-one" counseling and assistance to persons age 60 and older and Medicare recipients of any age to help them better understand the complexities of specific programs.

Counseling and assistance are available regarding public and private benefits, legal documents (advance directives), insurance information, preventive health-related services, and representation for administrative hearings and appeals.

The complexities of laws, rules and regulations governing legal, health and financial issues can be overwhelming.

Legal Assistance provides free individualized help on a variety of matters, including applications for governmental services, choices of health or prescription insurance coverage and choices of how an individual wants to be treated as they near the end of their life.

Legal Assistance can also provide an advocate to assist or represent an older person in an appeal or hearing when that person believes they have been wrongfully denied a service or benefit.

Legal services are coordinated with the Texas Legal Services Center and other qualified legal providers to ensure older adults receive accurate and accessible legal support.

HICAP and MIPPA are additional funding sources that assist the AAA in providing Medicare beneficiaries with one-on-one counseling for their Medicare, other types of insurance, prescription costs, and Medicare Savings Programs.

Legal Awareness - Provides information to groups of people to help them better understand the complexities of Medicare, Medicaid, and other government programs. Serves as an information link for all ages through educational events and workshops. Encourages the establishment of community resource centers. Fosters the creation of regional community partnerships that encourage and support greater public awareness.

Core Program Area 6: Ombudsman Services

Definition

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program advocates for residents of nursing facilities and assisted living communities. The program works to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of long-term care residents.

Residents and their families are served by developing and utilizing the talents and efforts of specially trained volunteers, professionals, advocacy and membership organizations, and regulatory agencies who are interested in long-term care and elder rights issues.

The primary focus of the program is on resolving resident issues and complaints relating to rights, quality of care, and quality of life for the residents.

Each of the nursing facilities and assisted living facilities in the region is visited by a staff Ombudsman or volunteer Ombudsman on a regular basis.

Staff Ombudsmen are required to respond to community-generated complaints within two business days of notification. Complaints usually come from family members, community professionals or directly from the facility.

Services provided by the program include:

- Advocacy - An Ombudsman advocates for the rights and quality of care to help protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of the resident.

- Counseling - Staff Ombudsman will often work with residents and/or their families on a variety of issues outside of the usual complaints. They may assist with Medicare or Medicaid eligibility issues, appeals, end of life issues or assist with appropriate referrals.
- Problem resolution - Using notification, negotiation, mediation or applicable rules and regulations, the Ombudsman can often assist residents, their families, and facilities in resolving differences or issues. When the
- Ombudsman cannot resolve the problem, or when abuse or complex issues are involved, the Ombudsman will make referrals to appropriate authorities.
- Training – The program provides some training to nursing home staff to help ensure that the residents receive quality of care and life in the facility.
- Empowerment - An Ombudsman may assist with the establishment and development of family and resident councils in the facility. The Ombudsman will assist the resident or family member in becoming an effective self-advocate.

Greatest Economic Need (GEN)

Operational Definition

Greatest Economic Need refers to older adults who lack sufficient financial resources to consistently afford basic necessities such as food, medication, housing, or transportation, and may also face barriers related to rural living, limited English proficiency, or access to services.

GEN in the Heart of Texas Planning and Service Area

Many counties within the Heart of Texas region experience persistent rural poverty, limited transportation infrastructure, and high healthcare costs. A significant number of older adults rely primarily on fixed incomes such as Social Security or disability benefits.

Strategies to Address Greatest Economic Need

The AAA prioritizes services for older adults with the greatest economic need through:

- Targeted outreach in low-income housing communities
- Assistance with financial needs, prescriptions, and essential expenses
- Partnerships with food banks and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)
- Coordination of services based on financial need and eligibility

Greatest Social Need

Greatest Social Need includes older adults who are frail, homebound, or socially isolated due to illness, disability, or cognitive impairment. Individuals are considered homebound if they cannot leave their home without assistance, and frail if they are functionally impaired and require substantial help with daily activities or supervision for health and safety reasons.

The AAA identifies individuals with the greatest social need through comprehensive assessment and prioritizes services accordingly.

Priority is given to:

- Older adults experiencing functional limitations in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs)
- Individuals living alone with dementia or cognitive impairment
- Older adults residing in rural or geographically isolated communities
- Caregivers who are the sole or primary support for dependent older adults

The Consumer Needs Evaluation (CNE) assessment tool is used to evaluate functional limitations and guide service prioritization.

Collaboration with Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

The AAA works collaboratively with numerous regional partners to ensure coordinated service delivery and reduce duplication of services.

Key partners include:

- HHSC Regional and Local Services (RLS)
- Local Mental Health Authorities
- Adult Protective Services (APS)
- Home Health Agencies
- Senior Centers and Nutrition Providers
- Transportation programs within HOTCOG

Through the Access and Assistance program, the AAA facilitates referrals, coordinates care planning, and helps individuals navigate available long-term services and supports.

Practices to Serve Older Adults with Physical and Mental Health Conditions

The AAA addresses the physical and behavioral health needs of older adults through integrated service delivery and regional partnerships.

Strategies include:

- Care coordination and hospital discharge planning
- Fall prevention initiatives
- Partnerships with the Crest Hospital, HOTBHN and other mental health providers
- Health maintenance services, including assistive devices and rolling walkers
- Wellness monitoring through Home Delivered Meals

Through coordinated planning, culturally responsive outreach, and strong community partnerships, the AAA supports older adults in aging safely, independently, and with dignity in their communities.

Needs Assessment Activities

Reference: [45 CFR 1321.65\(b\)\(3\)](#) & [45 CFR 1321.65\(c\)](#)

Broadly speaking, the Heart of Texas region has a projected total senior population of over 90 thousand individuals, putting it at roughly 23% of the total region's projected population, while the state average for senior population percentage is closer to 18%. Not only is the very rural Heart of Texas region a bit older than average for the state of Texas, but additionally our region is poorer than the state average. Per the State's dataset provided to AAAHOT for the Area Plan process, across the whole of Texas, the percentage of seniors living "Below Poverty" is projected as 11.6%, while the heart of Texas region is higher at 12.7%. Bosque (9.0%) and McLennan (10.1%) are below the state average, while the rest of the region is well above: more seniors in Falls (16.3), Freestone (14.4), Hill (12.4), and Limestone (13.7) face financial hardship than typical for the state of Texas.

Much of the region is rural and dispersed, which makes the expansion of locally-based resources more important. Census QuickFacts show very low population density in several HOTCOG counties: Bosque 18.6 persons per square mile, Falls 22.2, Freestone 22.1, Limestone 22.5, and Hill 37.4, versus 111.6 statewide in Texas. The rural, senior communities travel further distances on average to reach healthcare.

The issues currently facing seniors in the Heart of Texas are similar to needs identified in the previous Area Plan for FY24-26. AAAHOT met as many of its stated goals and objectives as budgetary constraints allowed. The end of COVID related funding was slated for the time covered by the last Area Plan. A historical analysis of pre-COVID annual budgets showed a consistent ramp of slow but steady growth, and AAAHOT anticipated a return to this historical trendline. Changes at the federal

and state levels during this period resulted in reduced funding to all HOTCOG-HHS programs in FY25 and FY26 compared to projections based on historic trends in year-to-year funding. These changes had negative consequences for AAAHOT and the region it serves, including reduced services and a reduction in AAAHOT's workforce.

With limited staffing and resources, AAAHOT's Needs Assessment activities for the FY27-29 Area Plan were focused on synthesizing the data collection and analysis performed by a variety of our regional Partner Organizations (PO) throughout our region, with our own data resources. Jan Enders (Legal Awareness, Benefits Counseling, and Special Projects) gathered these PO Needs Assessments over the course of December 2025 and January 2026, collecting the newest Needs Assessments performed by the respective organizations.

All major local healthcare providers are required to perform Needs Assessments regularly and AAAHOT reviewed at least one PO Needs Assessment specific to each county. Some PO Needs Assessments cover the entire Heart of Texas region as it is a designated Planning & Service Area for the Texas Health & Human Services Commission and served by a variety of governmental & private organizations.

Data population statistics provided by the State of Texas Office of Area Agencies on Aging (OAAA), as well as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) data that is made publicly available on the HOTCOG website (www.hotcogtx.gov/hotedd/ceds) also to help us identify population trends and issues impacting seniors in our Planning & Service Area (PSA). Our own award-winning Heart of Texas 211 Area Information Center captures data on the needs of callers daily, and the previous 12 months of that data were incorporated into our Needs Assessment analysis.

The collected PO Needs Assessments all used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect their data. A thorough review of each assessment was conducted, with patterns of need and gaps in service were identified within each county and across the entire region. The CEDS and 211 data was also analyzed from both county and regional perspectives.

The various Needs Assessments reviewed, in combination with our CEDS and 211 data, all together resolved into a compelling portrait of the needs of our region. The most frequently occurring high priority issues identified in relation to senior populations were:

- Access to High Quality Health Care
- Support for Aging in Place
- Caregiver Support
- Food & Housing Security
- Mental & Behavioral Health Support
- Expansion of Locally Available Resources in Rural Areas

The primary constraints limiting AAAHOT's ability to respond to these needs are all funding-related: more staffing and more service provision requires more funding. AAAHOT will seek opportunities beyond the historically utilized federal and state funding to supplement the waning support our programs receive. AAAHOT will also partner with organizations like HOTCOG's own Economic Development district to champion the expansion of healthcare and senior-related infrastructure within our rural communities.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Outcomes

Reference: [45 CFR 1321.65\(e\)](#)

The AAA established the following goals, objectives, strategies, and outcome measures based on findings from the regional needs assessment, demographic and service utilization analysis, and stakeholder input gathered throughout PSA 11. This planning framework ensures that programs funded under the Older Americans Act respond to the evolving needs of older adults and family caregivers in Heart of Texas while maintaining alignment with statewide aging priorities.

The needs assessment identified several priority service areas, including expanded access to home and community-based services, strengthened caregiver supports, improved transportation availability, enhanced opportunities for social engagement, and improved coordination among service providers. These findings were informed through analysis of demographic trends, program performance data, and statewide strategic priorities, including the Aging Texas Well initiative.

In accordance with OAA planning requirements, the AAA established outcome measures across three levels:

- **Short-term outcomes** reflect improvements in awareness, knowledge, and access to services among older adults, caregivers, and community partners.
- **Intermediate outcomes** reflect changes in service utilization, coordination practices, and system-level processes that strengthen service delivery.
- **Long-term outcomes** reflect sustained improvements in independence, health, and quality of life consistent with the goals of the Older Americans Act.

The following goals guide the AAA activities during the Area Plan period and align with the 2026–2028 Texas State Plan on Aging (SPoA).

Goal 1: Support Older Adults to Age in Their Community by Accessing Available Resources, Including Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Objective: Expand access to supportive services and nutrition assistance that enable older adults to safely remain in their homes and communities.

Strategies

- Provide care coordination, information and referral assistance, benefits counseling, and case management to assist older adults in accessing community resources.

- Support access to nutrition services, including congregate meals, grab-and-go meal options, and home-delivered meals to address food insecurity and promote health among older adults, particularly those with the greatest economic need.
- Coordinate with healthcare providers, hospitals, and community-based organizations to support transitions of care and continuity of services.
- Support access to transportation, residential repair, and other supportive services that facilitate aging in place.

Outcomes

- Short-Term: Increased awareness of available supportive services and nutrition programs among older adults and caregivers.
- Intermediate: Increased utilization of home- and community-based services and nutrition programs, including congregate and home-delivered meals.
- Long-Term: Older adults experience improved access to essential services, reduced food insecurity, and maintain independence in their homes and communities for longer periods of time.

Goal 2: Increase Awareness About Caregiving and the Support Available

Objective: Strengthen the capacity of family caregivers through expanded access to information, respite services, and supportive resources.

Strategies

- Provide caregiver education, REACH TX, and counseling referral opportunities.
- Expand access to respite services to reduce caregiver stress and burnout.
- Collaborate with regional organizations specializing in dementia and caregiver support to increase access to services.

Outcomes

- **Short-Term:** Increased awareness of caregiver support services and educational resources.
- **Intermediate:** Increased participation in caregiver support programs and respite services.
- **Long-Term:** Improved caregiver well-being and increased ability of caregivers to support older adults living in the community.

Goal 3: Improve Communication and Collaboration Among Texas State Agencies, AAAs, Providers, and Community-Based Organizations

Objective: Strengthen coordination across the regional aging services network to improve access to services and reduce duplication of efforts.

Strategies

- Maintain active partnerships with state agencies, local governments, healthcare providers, and community organizations.
- Support coordinated referrals and information sharing with the Aging and Disability Resource Center and Information and Referral systems.
- Participate in regional planning initiatives and collaborative service delivery efforts.

Outcomes

- **Short-Term:** Increased communication and information sharing among service providers and community partners.
- **Intermediate:** Improved referral processes and service coordination across agencies.
- **Long-Term:** A more integrated regional service delivery system that improves access to services for older adults and caregivers.

Goal 4: Strengthen Aging Services Network Infrastructure

Objective: Maintain strong administrative, fiscal, and program management systems to support effective and accountable service delivery.

Strategies

- Maintain internal oversight systems to ensure fiscal accountability, contract monitoring, and program compliance.
- Provide ongoing training and professional development for staff and volunteers.
- Utilize statewide data management systems to monitor service performance and program outcomes.

Outcomes

- **Short-Term:** Increased staff capacity and program knowledge through training, technical assistance, and participation in events such as the REACH conference.
- **Intermediate:** Improved program monitoring, reporting accuracy, enhanced cross-sector collaboration, and more consistent application of best practices across the network.
- **Long-Term:** A sustainable, coordinated, and effective Aging Services Network capable of meeting the growing and diverse needs of older adults in the Heart of Texas.

Long Range Planning

Reference: [OAA of 1965, as amended through P.L. 116-131 \(3/25/2020\)](#)
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Our local Aging Services Network (which includes the AAA, HOTCOG's HHS Programs, as well as other organizations that provides services to seniors) faces unprecedented changes in the socioeconomic landscape, as do the other ASNs in the 24 PSAs across Texas, and indeed across the nation.

The Baby Boomer generation is aging into the eldest cohort, increasing the levels of in-home and facility-based care needed, and Generation X is now aging into senior status as well. The overall strain on ASN's across the state of Texas will only continue to grow as the total senior population continues to grow, all while many of the organizations that make up that network face reductions in funding and thus capability.

Emerging Artificial Intelligence-based technologies promise to disrupt much of our nation's socioeconomic activity, for both better and worse. As of April 2026, it feels impossible to predict what changes might occur. One thing that seems certain, our total population of seniors is likely to grow, especially in the oldest cohorts, over the next ten years.

AAAHOT will seek new partnerships and new funding opportunities to continue providing its vital services to the seniors of the Heart of Texas, including but not limited to new federal, state and private foundation grants. AAAHOT will also adopt new technologies such as AI-based interventions, as such technologies mature into stable forms with strong protections against fraud and exploitation.

AAAHOT will continue to rely on guidance and advisement from its local partners, especially the members of HOTCOG's Executive committee and the HOTCOG-HHS Advisory Council, to inform its approach to serving the needs of the seniors of the Heart of Texas.

AAAHOT encourages the federally designated State Unit on Aging, THHSC, to continue to seek increased funding support for its core programs as listed above in this document. Those programs have long histories of successfully serving the seniors of Texas, and the whole of Texas is made poorer when support falters for those programs.