

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Financial Services  
2129 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 2, 2022

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Many Americans have suffered hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to experience housing instability, including homelessness. Older adults are particularly vulnerable because they may not qualify for programs such as Medicare, Social Security, or senior housing until they reach a certain age. Other older adults are at risk of losing their housing because they live on a fixed income or lost a job and cannot afford housing cost increases. Housing discrimination and systemic racism also further compound these factors for older adults of color.<sup>1</sup>

A growing population of older adults live in poverty or grow old in shelters or on the street, which may have major implications for local and national housing, health care, and other social service infrastructures as they age. In one 2019 study, researchers estimated that the number of people over 65 experiencing homelessness will rise rapidly through 2030.<sup>2</sup> Another study found that older homeless adults have a greater prevalence of geriatric health conditions than housed adults 20 years older than them.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, if racial disparities in the homeless population continue to worsen, we can expect these trends to have a disproportionate effect on older adults of color, especially Black older adults.<sup>4</sup>

I am writing to request a Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of the aging population in America, their risks of experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness, and federal programs that target older Americans and help prevent homelessness. I also request that this review identify any racial and ethnic disparities across the aging population and how federal programs address such disparities. Such a study is necessary to help our country prepare for demographic shifts and ensure that programs and services are able to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. In its evaluation, I request that GAO address the following questions, to the extent possible:

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<sup>1</sup> Paul, D. W. et al, *Racial Discrimination in the Life Course of Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness: Results from the HOPE HOME Study* (2020).

<sup>2</sup>Dennis Culhane, et al., *The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness: Could Housing Solutions Be Funded by Avoidance of Excess Shelter, Hospital, and Nursing Home Costs?* (University of Pennsylvania, Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy: 2019). Accessed at: <https://www.aisp.upenn.edu/aginghomelessness>.

<sup>3</sup>Rebecca Brown, et al., "Geriatric conditions in a population-based sample of older homeless adults." *Gerontologist*, vol. 57, no. 4 (2017): 757-766. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5881727>.

<sup>4</sup> According to HUD's 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, 39.4% of the U.S. homeless population was Black, despite representing 12.4% of the total population at that time, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

- 1) What is known about the number, characteristics, including race, ethnicity, disability, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and needs of older adults and the elderly experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness? How has this population changed over time, and what factors have contributed to these trends?
- 2) What federal programs target assistance to address and prevent homelessness for older adults and elderly persons, including to address racial disparities among this population? What further steps, if any, could agencies take to help respond to the aging of the homeless population?
- 3) What promising practices have communities used to equitably meet the housing needs of this population, including those implemented using supplemental funds received as a result of COVID relief laws?

Thank you for your cooperation and attention in this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff member Elayne Weiss at [Elayne.Weiss@mail.house.gov](mailto:Elayne.Weiss@mail.house.gov), or Alia Fierro at [Alia.Fierro@mail.house.gov](mailto:Alia.Fierro@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,



Maxine Waters