

SETTING PUBLIC POLICIES

AARP and Its Members in Dialogue

As one of the leading voices for an aging America, AARP regularly monitors the needs, concerns and opinions of its members. AARP develops its public policies through a consistent, ongoing process that begins with member input and policy analysis. The *Policy Book* presents the association's approved policies, and forms the basis for all its advocacy efforts during the year.

AARP's Board of Directors and National Policy Council—Founded 50 years ago by Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, AARP is governed by a board of directors. AARP's board-appointed National Policy Council (NPC) helps the board formulate national, state and local policy.

An advisory committee to the AARP board, the NPC is composed of individuals who represent a diverse cross section of AARP members and have a proven record of public policy experience and interest. In making annual public policy recommendations for the board's consideration and approval, the NPC studies public policy options and weighs the opinions of members and guidance from nationally-renowned policy experts and staff.

Member input—Throughout the year AARP seeks input on public policy issues from many sources. The association receives tens of thousands of calls, letters and e-mail messages from members and routinely surveys members and the general public on a broad range of issues. The board of directors and the NPC also host national policy forums that are publicized and open to all, and actively solicit policy input from state volunteers on a continuing basis.

Implementing policy—Once the board of directors finalizes federal, state and local policy recommendations, the association disseminates them in a variety of formats. The *Policy Book* provides the basis for advocacy efforts by AARP volunteers and staff. Under the guidance of the association's chief executive officer, volunteers and staff work together to implement the association's policy goals.

At the federal level AARP works to affect legislation that reflects these policies. The association's staff in Washington, DC lobbies the Administration, Congress and regulatory agencies, while members of the board of directors, along with other association volunteers, regularly testify on Capitol Hill on behalf of older Americans.

AARP's advocacy efforts in the states (and in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands) also reflect the board-approved policies. The policies recognize that laws, regulations and political realities differ widely from state to state: legislation absent but critically needed in one state may have been enacted in another state years ago. AARP leadership in each state develops specific strategies after researching the views and needs of volunteers and members. Based on the association's annual policy priorities, and within the parameters articulated in the *Policy Book*, state AARP leaders interpret the association's goals for local leaders and guide them in selecting policy issues and creating strategies to pursue them.

The association bolsters its federal and state advocacy with grassroots and elections activities—including urging AARP members to contact legislators and regulators on key issues and educating

the public on important policy matters and candidates' positions. And AARP works for change through the courts.

How AARP decides on legislative and regulatory proposals—The *Policy Book* offers policy statements and principles but does not endorse specific legislation or regulatory proposals. The association uses board-approved policy to determine whether to support a specific bill or regulation. On far-reaching proposals that will have a major impact on older Americans and their families, the board carefully considers AARP policy, as well as feedback from members through surveys, e-mails, letters and telephone calls; input at policy forums and meetings; public polling; and policy analysis. The board uses all this information in deciding whether to support specific legislation or regulatory proposals.

Ongoing policy analysis—Formation of the *Policy Book* begins anew each year. Following AARP's annual public policy meeting, the association holds forums and conducts research and policy studies on current issues. The association analyzes the impact of new legislation and regulations and examines proposed federal and state bills for consistency with AARP policy and the larger public interest.

The association's Office of Policy Integration (OPI) facilitates development, implementation and oversight of the policy development process, coordinating the direct involvement of AARP's volunteer leadership in creating the *Policy Book*. The association's Public Policy Institute (PPI) takes responsibility for drafting the policies. Other staff throughout the association, including advocacy staff from AARP's 53 state offices and at headquarters, contribute to the formulation of AARP's policy.

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