



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

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**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

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## **Statement**

### **En Banc Hearing February 5, 2009**

**Sandy Markwood  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)  
on Behalf of the Keeping Seniors Connected Coalition**

On June 12, 2009, the nation's broadcasters will switch from analog to digital transmission of television signals. On behalf of the *Keeping Seniors Connected Coalition*, comprised of nine leading national aging organizations, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) received funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to help vulnerable older Americans across the country successfully transition to digital television.

#### ***Keeping Seniors Connected Campaign:***

##### **Why It Is Important**

An estimated eight million older Americans, many of whom live in rural, low-income, or minority communities, own an analog television set not compatible with the new digital broadcast format. Their options for watching television after the digital transition are to purchase a digital converter box, purchase a new TV with built-in digital tuner, or subscribe to pay-TV service.

Simple enough in theory, but for the many thousands of vulnerable older Americans least able to navigate the new digital environment, the digital switch is likely to pose a challenge. One potential barrier is access. For example, an older person without a computer may not know how to get an application for a converter box coupon. Older persons lacking transportation or with mobility limitations may be unable to get to a retailer to purchase a converter box without assistance.

An even more serious barrier is the technology itself. All-digital television involves a level of complexity far greater than for analog TV, such as connecting and programming the converter box, adjusting inside and exterior antennas, operating the remotes, and locating favorite channels. It is likely that older people with low vision, those who are less dexterous, and those with limited familiarity with technology will find the changeover frustrating and difficult.

Without one-to-one education and direct, hands-on, customized assistance, many older Americans could see their television screens go dark after the transition.

## The Campaign Strategy

The *Digital TV: Keeping Seniors Connected Campaign* is mobilizing the national aging service delivery system at the community level by engaging the memberships of the nine participating national associations to help ensure that older people who currently watch over-the-air broadcasts are not excluded from the digital promise. The specific strategy for the Campaign is to:

- Educate older adults on the digital switchover, particularly those with fixed or lower level incomes who cannot afford a new TV or cable or satellite; those who may not know how to adapt their televisions; rural, isolated and homebound elders; and minority and limited English-speaking older persons.
- Provide one-to-one help to those least able to afford cable or pay TV service to:
  - assess the need for a digital converter box;
  - apply for the federally-funded \$40 coupon to purchase a converter box;
  - acquire and set up the box and related equipment;
  - learn how to use the new technology; and
  - trouble-shoot digital TV problems.

n4a and its partners have teamed up to fund over 100 local grassroots education and assistance campaigns in 39 states, the District of Columbia, and 86 cities across the country. Locations were selected to reflect NTIA “red zones” and demographic factors that reflect the populations of older persons in greatest need of assistance—low-income, minority, limited English speaking, homebound, and rural/frontier.

The *Digital TV: Keeping Seniors Connected Campaign* expects to reach or exceed its goal of providing assistance to 250,000 vulnerable older Americans nationwide.

## National Campaign Partners

n4a, the lead partner of the *Keeping Seniors Connected Campaign*, represents Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American aging programs—the local infrastructure organizations of the Older Americans Act’s national aging service delivery system. The campaign’s national partners represent state agencies on aging, key community service providers, specialized services for minority elders, and older consumers.

National partners are:

- National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, *Lead Partner*
- AARP
- Asociación Nacional Pro Personas Mayores
- Meals on Wheels Association of America
- National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
- National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
- National Association of State Units on Aging
- National Caucus and Center on Black Aged

- National Council on Aging

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*The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging** (n4a) is the leading voice on aging issues for the national network of 650 Area Agencies on Aging and 240 Title VI Native American Aging Programs. n4a's primary mission is to build the capacity of its members to help older persons and persons with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible.*

