

Advocates and Researchers Team Up to Make Data Speak



Chicago, IL (March 2026) - Researchers who produce important policy data and advocates who need it often live in different worlds. Last spring, as the threat of what became H.R.1 (often referred to as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act) increased in intensity, researchers at LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston, Dr. Marc Cohen and Dr. Jane Tavares, broke down those silos and teamed up with advocates like Justice in Aging to determine what data would be most compelling and what formats would be most helpful in educating policymakers about the potential impact the pending legislation would have on older adults. What emerged was a project, funded by RRF Foundation for Aging (RRF), that is producing practical, time-sensitive, advocacy-driven research that has gained widespread attention and influence.

This critical collaboration between RRF grantee partners highlights the Foundation's integrated approach to impactful grantmaking.

Much of the research produced by the UMass Boston team has focused on the harmful effects that Medicaid cuts and work requirements under H.R. 1 will have on older adults. As evidence of the uptake of the team's research, Health Affairs Forefront announced that its second most-read article in 2025 was UMass Boston's piece, "[History Repeats? Faced with Medicaid Cuts, States Reduced Support for Older Adults and Disabled People.](#)"

And the Milbank Quarterly announced that the team's piece, "[Who's Affected by Medicaid Work Requirements? It's Not Who You Think,](#)" was the #1 opinion piece in its 2025 publications.

Both journals have large media and advocacy audiences, along with policymakers and decision-makers from both the public and private sectors. Much of the data from these articles has been turned into fact sheets and infographics and used in Capitol Hill visits, led by RRF grantee partner Justice in Aging.

Once implementation of H.R. 1 began, the research team turned toward producing data for advocates working to mitigate as much harm as possible for older adults. There is evidence that the advocate-researcher partnership has been effective. The UMass team produced research that analyzed the impact of a potential statutory exclusion from the Medicaid work-reporting requirements under the medically frail category, known as "serious or complex medical conditions." The research team presented a definition and criteria of the term to the Primary Care Associations Leadership Council and the Medicaid Medical Directors Network. It provided an analysis of the population, primarily older working adults who could be exempt from work requirements if the criteria were applied. As a result, Medicaid Medical Directors in at least 30 states are working with the data and information provided as they think through how to operationalize the definitions and consider the best way to utilize the UMass team's concept and analyses.

This project demonstrates the value of bringing advocates and researchers together to ensure that research is time-sensitive and relevant. It has reinforced RRF's commitment to invest in **actionable** policy research.