

CILs vs. AAAs—What are they and how can they help me?

At PHI, we often get calls and emails from polio survivors looking for resources in their community. Often, it's for help in making home modifications or assistance with transportation. Two excellent places to start are a Center for Independent Living (CIL) or an Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

What are CILs?

The first Center for Independent Living was established in 1972 when Ed Roberts, a polio survivor, and other students with disabilities from the University of California at Berkeley demanded control over their lives and full access in their communities.



Ed Roberts being interviewed for St. Louis news.

When some people first hear the name, they mistakenly believe a Center for Independent Living is a type of residential facility. Rather, CILs are non-profit organizations which assist seniors and people with disabilities who want to increase personal freedom and live more independently. CILs are managed and staffed by people with disabilities, are located in the communities they serve, and assist people with all types of disabilities.

The foundation of CIL services is the peer relationship—people with disabilities assisting other people with disabilities as role models, mentors and partners. Each Center is unique because it offers services based upon the particular needs of its community. However, all CILs offer services broadly in the following core areas:

- ◆ Information and Referral
- ◆ Peer Support
- ◆ Individual and Community Advocacy
- ◆ Independent Living Skills Training

Currently, there are 340 Centers for independent living, with more than 224 satellite locations. A

center's service area may cover anywhere from a single county to a dozen in less populated areas. Today, 60% (1,911) of the US counties receive service from a CIL.

What can they do for me?

As noted above, available services vary from center to center, but in general CILs can assist with the following: locating accessible, affordable housing; providing peer counseling; providing benefits counseling; offering information on or supplying assistive devices such as raised toilet seats, shower benches, grab bars or ramps; finding accessible public transportation; or arranging for personal assistance services.

Where do I find the center that serves my area?

The Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) program has a clickable map online that can quickly locate the center nearest you. The listing for each CIL displays which specific counties each Center serves. You can find it at www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory.

What are AAAs?

Area Agencies on Aging, like CILs, trace their roots back to the early 1970s. Area Agencies on Aging were formally established in the 1973 Older Americans Act (OAA) as the “on-the-ground” organizations charged with helping vulnerable older adults (60+) live with independence and dignity in their homes and communities. You do not have to have a disability to be eligible for services provided by an AAA.

As of 2016, there were 622 AAAs serving older adults in virtually every community in the nation. Like CILs, AAAs are set up to meet the unique demands of their communities they serve and to provide programs that support the health and independence of older adults in those communities, which is why they are not all exactly alike.

What can they do for me?

AAAs are tasked with developing and delivering a range of long-term services and supports (LTSS). All AAAs offer services in five core areas:

- ◆ Elder Rights
- ◆ Caregivers
- ◆ Nutrition
- ◆ Health & Wellness
- ◆ Supportive Services

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Supportive services can include in-home services, homemaker and chore services, transportation and legal services. Some AAAs even provide for minor home repairs or small modifications to make your home more accessible. Nutritional programs often provide home-delivered meals to those in need. Most AAAs also provide insurance counseling and case management. AAAs can help consumers transition from hospital back to their home, as well.

Programs are designed to help those with the most economic or social need, but they are not means-tested. Anyone 60 or older can access services provided under the OAA.

Where do I locate my Area Agency on Aging?

All AAAs have local hotlines or websites to provide consumers with information and assistance, so if you know the name of your local AAA, start there. Alternatively, you can find a AAA by ZIP code via the Eldercare Locator website (www.eldercare.gov) or you can speak with an information specialist by calling 800-677-1116. ■