

ADvancing States Honors Barbara Merrill, AARP's Public Policy Institute, and Ellie Hollander at 2026 HCBS Conference

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ARLINGTON, VA — ADvancing States, the national association representing state and territorial agencies on aging, disabilities, and Medicaid long-term services and supports (LTSS), today announced the recipients of its three signature national awards, to be presented at the 2026 HCBS Conference, held August 22–27 at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront. This year's honorees are Barbara Merrill, CEO of ANCOR, recipient of the Katie Beckett Award; AARP's Public Policy Institute (PPI), recipient of the Dr. Jeanette Takamura Caregiving Award; and Ellie Hollander, President and CEO of Meals on Wheels America, recipient of the Arthur S. Flemming Award.

"Each year, these awards give us the chance to step back and recognize the people and organizations whose work makes life better for older adults and people with disabilities — often behind the scenes, and always in service of the field we all care about," said Martha Roherty, Executive Director of ADvancing States. "Barbara Merrill, AARP's Public Policy Institute, and Ellie Hollander each represent, in their own way, exactly what this network stands for: tireless advocacy, rigorous evidence, and an unwavering commitment to the people we serve. We are proud to honor them."

Katie Beckett Award: Barbara Merrill

The Katie Beckett Award honors an individual whose work reflects the legacy of Katie Beckett and her mother, Julie, whose advocacy opened the door for children with disabilities to receive Medicaid-funded services at home rather than in institutions. This year's recipient, Barbara Merrill, has served as CEO of ANCOR since 2014, a period during which the association's membership has more than quadrupled, cementing its role as the leading voice in Washington for community-based providers of intellectual and developmental disability services. Merrill's career spans more than three decades as an advocate, attorney, and Maine state legislator, including work to raise wages for direct support professionals and to codify Maine's Mental Health Parity law.

"Barbara has spent her career making sure that the people closest to the ground — direct support professionals, providers, and the individuals they serve — have someone fighting for them in the rooms where decisions get made," said Ursel McElroy, ADvancing States Immediate Past President. "This award carries Katie Beckett's name and her family's legacy, and Barbara has earned every bit of that honor."

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Dr. Jeanette Takamura Caregiving Award: AARP's Public Policy Institute

The Dr. Jeanette Takamura Caregiving Award honors work carrying forward the legacy of Dr. Takamura, who as U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging led the modernization of the Older Americans Act and established the National Family Caregiver Support Program. This year's recipient, AARP's Public Policy Institute (PPI), was recognized for its sustained body of research documenting the scale and impact of family caregiving in the United States. PPI's newest report, *Family Caregivers of Adults Age 50-Plus: The Caregiving in the US 2025 Series* (July 2026), found that more than 51 million Americans — nearly one in five adults — now provide care to an older adult, with caregivers reporting longer caregiving durations and more intensive care than in years past. PPI's companion report, *Valuing the Invaluable 2026: Family Caregivers' Contribution Reaches \$1 Trillion* (March 2026), estimated that the nation's 59 million family caregivers provided 49.5 billion hours of unpaid care in 2024, worth \$1.01 trillion — a figure that exceeded total federal, state, and local Medicaid spending that year. Rita Choula accepted the award on behalf of PPI.

"PPI has given our entire field the data we need to make the case that family caregiving isn't a private matter — it's the backbone of America's long-term care system," said Jakenna Lebsock, ADvancing States Board Vice President, who presented the award. "Every time one of us walks into a legislator's office armed with PPI's research, we're standing on the shoulders of their work."

Arthur S. Flemming Award: Ellie Hollander

Established in 1978, the Arthur S. Flemming Award honors leaders whose work has had a lasting, positive impact on the lives of the nation's elders. This year's recipient, Ellie Hollander, has served as President and CEO of Meals on Wheels America since 2013, leading a national rebrand, new investments in infrastructure and research, and an ambitious plan to End the Wait® for seniors facing hunger and isolation. Under Hollander's leadership, Meals on Wheels America has continued to build capacity even as local providers face rising demand, thinning volunteer ranks, and flat federal funding — challenges that were on full display this spring, when a \$70 million unrestricted gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott drew national attention to both the scale of need and the limits of what philanthropy alone can solve. Hollander was named to Forbes' 2025 "50 Over 50" list in the Impact category for her leadership in the field.

"Ellie has never sugarcoated how hard this moment is for the seniors her network serves, and she has never let that reality slow her down," said Jason Kavulich,

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ADvancing States Board Member At-Large, who presented the award. "She leads with both honesty and resolve, and this field is stronger because of it."

Merrill will be honored on the opening day of the conference. PPI and Hollander will be formally recognized during the Federal Partners Plenary and Awards Ceremony at the 2026 HCBS Conference in Baltimore. More information about the conference is available at www.advancingstates.org.