In keeping with The Gerontologist’s mission to offer a multidisciplinary understanding of human aging, including the impact of social policy, we are expanding the Practice Concepts section to include papers that specifically analyze public policy as it affects aging populations and aging processes. We believe that a more explicit focus on social policy analysis will fill a need for increased awareness and understanding of the role of older adults in the policy-making process, as well as the impact of public policy on the well-being of older populations at federal, state, and local levels.

To that end, we invite scholars to submit manuscripts that analyze relevant policy to the Practice Concepts and Policy Analysis editor. The manuscripts must adhere to the current word limit of 4,000 words for a Practice Concepts piece. The chief purpose of a policy analysis is to explain and share the insights obtained in the examination of a policy problem.

There are four major components of a Policy Analysis paper. The first step in a policy analysis is to define and describe a specific policy issue that affects older adults. Raising an interesting policy question that can be answered through data analyses, as does Binstock in “Older voters and the 2008 Election” (Binstock, 2009, pp. 697–701), is another way to define and delineate a specific policy issue. In this section of the manuscript, sufficient background information should be presented so that readers understand the context in which the policy issue or question is situated. Such context can include the key historical aspects of the issue, as well as the various policies and policy networks (political figures or organizations, interest groups, think tanks) that exist to address the issue (Patton & Sawicki, 1986). A brief discussion of the major stakeholders in the issue being featured is also appropriate.

The second step in the policy analysis paper is to provide the readers with specific information about why this particular issue and an analysis of it are important to the field of aging. Here, the author should offer a conceptual framework that will be used to guide the policy analysis. This section should contain a review of the relevant literature that will tie together key concerns raised with historical background on the topic, showing the reader some of the reasons why the issue has been difficult to resolve or is in need of additional policy-making efforts or change. What are the “facts” surrounding this issue and to what extent do the various stakeholders agree on these facts and the policies they have spawned to date?

Next is the heart of the paper, an analysis of the issue. In this section, we will look for an in-depth description of the sample and data used (if a secondary data analysis), the methods of data collection and analysis carried out (if new data were collected), and the specific findings of the analysis. We understand that in some instances, the “data” to be used...
will be different than that available in a standard research paper. However, it is important that the analysis contain sufficient information and detail to justify the conclusions.

Finally, a discussion section should be presented. This section should focus on the implications of the findings for older adults and for the policy changes that affect them. If new policy initiatives are recommended, then a description of these initiatives and their possible reception by policy makers is appropriate. A brief discussion of intended and unintended consequences for older adults and others will bolster the argument for new policy initiatives.

According to Patton and Sawicki (1986), one of the hallmarks of a well-done policy analysis is the ability of the decision maker “to weigh the consequences of changes in assumptions, values and uncertainties and come to an independent conclusion” (p. 13). Likewise, it is our hope that our published analyses will enable readers of The Gerontologist to make informed decisions about public policies that affect our growing population of older adults, their families, and their communities. We also hope that such analyses will promote and provoke other scholars to conduct more policy-related research. All policy analysis manuscripts will be reviewed on these bases. Please note that this extension of the section is NOT an opportunity for contributors to make unsubstantiated soapbox stands or to engage in polemics.

References