



Summary of Key AARP Montana Legislative Efforts for 2009

Expansion of Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) – (HB 2 & HB 645)

In January of 2008 AARP Montana formed a coalition of over 40 groups representing advocates for seniors and people with physical disabilities and providers of HCBS. We had four goals to expand and improve HCBS and met those goals in the following ways:

- Significant expansion of services providing access to 250 more people and outreach services.
- Increase in reimbursement to assisted living facilities to address shortage of available placements for Medicaid HCBS recipients.
- Direct care worker compensation (available to Medicaid direct care workers in nursing homes and HCBS) to address high turnover of workers.
- Refunding of Health Care for Health Care Workers Program – a program that started up in January '09 and already has a track record of helping to retain workers.

Health Care Reform

Throughout 2008 AARP MT participated as a lead consumer organization in a large diverse coalition representing health care providers, insurers, employers, and others to work on health care reform. Our accomplishments during the 2009 legislative session include:

- Expansion of successful Insure Montana program, doubling the number of small businesses receiving health insurance. (HB 258)
- Healthy Montana Kids – 70% of Montanans voted for I-155, an initiative to expand CHIP and Medicaid for kids up to 250% FPL, covering almost all the uninsured children in MT. Full funding for this major expansion became the session's biggest political football, but in the end the Healthy Montana Kids measure was successful. (HB2)
- Interim committee to work on health care reform – SJ 35 directs the Children and Families interim committee to focus on HCR preparing bills for the 2011 session and overseeing implementation of HCR initiatives passed by congress.
- Health IT funding- start up funding for a coordinated statewide Health IT system. (HB 645)
- Health Corp for in-home care – allows retired doctors to volunteer care without needing malpractice insurance (HB 579)
- Expansion of Community Health Centers (FQHCs).
- Creation of a Medicaid buy-in option for individuals with disabilities. This option will help people stay in jobs and still be able to get Medicaid benefits. This was a significant victory for disability advocacy groups which we supported. (SB 119)

Senior and Long-term Care successes

- \$3.5 million dollars for Area Agencies on Aging (\$3 M undesignated and \$.5 M for senior meals) (HB 645)
- 4 additional staff for Adult Protective Services. (HB 2)
- Uniform Adult Guardianship Act to improve guardianship proceedings when those involved live in different states. (HB 477)
- \$300,000 additional funds for matching grants to develop transportation systems for seniors and persons with disabilities. (HB 2)

Consumer Protection, Low-income assistance, & Election and Energy Issues

- Revisions of viatical settlement laws adding more consumer protections. (SB151)
- Consumer protections regulating debt settlement companies (HB 318)
- Establish close relative registry of those interested in guardianship of children (HB 397)
- Making permanent the Universal Systems Benefit program for low-income energy assistance, conservation and weatherization. (HB 27)
- Post-election audits of voting machines (SB 155)
- Improve access to low-income property tax assistance program (SB 115)
- Inflationary adjustment for exclusion of pension income for lower income persons (HB 315)

Good Defeats (Bills we opposed successfully)

- Repeal of same-day voter registration law – this law significantly increased access to voting in the last two elections. Election administrators do not like the hassle of registering voters on Election Day, but the merits of improved turnout prevailed. (HB 88)
- Repeal of the non-gender insurance law that prohibits gender discrimination in insurance rates and benefits – the repeal was defeated once again. (SB 142)
- Elections by mail-in ballots only – strong concerns about access to voting for Indians and youth voter contributed to the defeat of this bill which has other problems as well. (HB 18 & SB 394)
- Stricter ID requirements for voter registration and voting (HB 99)

Montana Advocacy Effort by the Numbers

BILLS AND TESTIMONY:

- Number of bills actively involved in: 63
- Number of additional bills tracked: 141
- Number of testimony presentations: 90
 - Number of volunteer testimony presentations: 58
 - Number of staff testimony presentations: 32

MAJOR GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES:

- Phone calls from AARP members to legislators.
- Email Action Alerts: 6 alerts concerning HCBS, predatory lending, Rx detailing, health care reform, funding for AAAs.
- Postcard campaign to state senators to support the Medicaid HCBS expansion. The response was critical to preventing an attempt to cut the expansion.
- Senior Lobby Day – over 300 people from around the state attended.

Montana Budget and Policy Center

- In 2008 Claudia Clifford, Advocacy ASD, helped launch the Montana Budget and Policy Center (MBPC), a state affiliate of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Clifford, a MBPC Board member, guided the legislative strategy of MBPC during this inaugural session as it worked on issues of progressive taxation (a state Earned Income Tax Credit, low-income circuit breakers in property tax reappraisal mitigation) and making the case that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funds should be used to prevent cuts in essential social services. MBPC established itself as a source of well researched, objective analysis on budget and taxation issues to benefit all Montanans.