



AARP Montana Legislative Priority

Home and Community-Based Services – Crucial Choices for Quality of Life

A recent survey of AARP members in Montana showed that 70 percent of respondents ranked remaining in their homes as a top concern. And 75 percent said that helping people age in place should be a top legislative priority.

A key priority for AARP in Montana is helping older adults to meet their long-term care needs by supporting home and community-based care. AARP Montana is advocating for a package of improvements in the 2009 legislative session to expand the availability of long term care services and choices under the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services program. Through these efforts, we are working to assure that high quality long term care services are available to all Montanans.

What are Home and Community-based services?

Medicaid Funded Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) is a way for low-income Montanans who need nursing facility level of care to stay in their homes. HCBS include a number of programs, including: Personal Assistance Service, members of the Community Services Bureau, and Hospice Care for the terminally ill. These programs are federally matched by Medicaid funding.

Montana's HCBS are in need of improvements, and AARP and others are advocating for a package that will help hundreds of Montanans get the help they need in the environment they choose. This package includes:

- ✓ Provide services to everyone on the waiting list. 403 people said that they would take advantage of Medicaid HCBS tomorrow if it was possible. The next state budget should expand funding in the Senior and Long Term Care budget to ensure home-access to services for the people who need them.
- ✓ Increase provider rates at least 2% per year. To meet inflationary costs provider rates would need to increase 3.5%, but given a tight state budget 2% is a minimum. If provider rates do not keep pace with inflation, the quality of care will decline.

Being a direct care worker is a very difficult and demanding job. In order to keep a high quality of care for Home and Community Based Services, Montana must address workforce shortages and high turnover rates. Three simple steps will make drastic improvements:

- Maintain new Health Care for Health Care Workers Program. To best take care of needy Montanans, we need to provide them with the best help possible. The workers themselves must be provided health care for this to happen.
- Pay Increase for long term direct care workers. Providers who serve Medicaid clients cannot significantly increase these workers' wages without support from the Medicaid program. We are advocating for a wage increase of at least 75 cents an hour, and as much as \$1.50/hour, by mid 2011 which help retain these highly valuable direct-care workers.
- Restore funding for Area Agencies on Aging – last legislature gave the AAA \$3 million to help provide more meals and care, but the current budget was stripped of this funding.

Help ensure that Montanans have choices as they age – choices that include remaining in their own homes and remaining in their communities. Support Home and community-based services measures in HB2.