Long-Term Care in Oregon — an Innovative System in Jeopardy

Oregon is home to a system of long-term care that has been held up as the model for the country. It puts a groundbreaking focus on providing care where seniors and people with disabilities want it: in their homes and communities, reducing those in institutional settings like nursing homes. The system is codified in state law promising “independence, choice and dignity” and it saves significant taxpayer dollars.

But decades of neglect and disinvestment have weakened this system. The current economic crisis, coupled with a quickly graying population, demand that we act now and reverse this trend. The combined economic and human impacts from drastic cuts or inaction are simply too great. Oregon’s home-and community-based system is an economic engine that provides 39,000 jobs, generates $1.7 billion in economic activity in communities across Oregon, and leverages hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding. And Oregon’s 65+ population is expected to more than double in less than 20 years, comprising nearly one in five Oregonians and signaling impending strain on a system already crumbling. More than ever, fulfilling the promise of independence, choice and dignity is the right thing to do. It also remains the fiscally responsible, cost-effective thing to do, especially now.

The Campaign’s 2009 Legislative Priorities

1. Preserve Medicaid access for Oregon’s most vulnerable.
2. Protect Oregon’s array of home and community-based service options.
3. Ensure safe, quality care by recruiting and training a qualified, stable workforce.
4. Improve the livability of Oregon’s communities through affordable housing and special needs transportation options, access to mental health and addictions services, and volunteer supports and services.
Preserving, Fixing and then Reinvesting in Oregon’s Long-Term System

We know that Oregon’s long-term care system IS the right system. It’s a system designed to honor the independence, choice and dignity of seniors and people with disabilities by allowing home and community-based alternatives. And it’s a system that is highly cost-efficient that saves taxpayer dollars and leverages major federal funding. However, it’s in deep jeopardy and faces drastic cuts that Oregon’s most vulnerable, its communities and its economy just can’t afford.

We must first preserve what we have and know works well. Then, fix the things that will help strengthen the system and ensure quality care. And we must invest in efforts that enable us to expand access and supports, including information, early intervention and prevention. These steps include:

1. **Preserve Medicaid access for Oregon’s most vulnerable.**

   Oregon’s long-term care providers are constantly battling costs that greatly outweigh the Medicaid reimbursement they receive for providing services to Oregon’s low-income frail and elderly. At the same time, potential budget cuts and significant reductions in eligibility for Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities could seriously hinder the ability of Oregon’s most vulnerable populations to access the Medicaid system. Historically, Oregon’s long-term care system has provided quality services to a great number of Oregonians, and despite demonstrable increases in need, Oregon’s system now actually serves fewer clients than it has in past years. In order to stabilize the system and ensure access to Medicaid services for Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities, the Legislature should:
   - Avoid broad cuts to service eligibility for vulnerable populations.
   - Sustain investments in adequate reimbursement for Oregon’s nursing homes and community-based care providers.
   - Make smart investments in the Medicaid system to maximize the availability of federal dollars – all the more important given the increased federal match in the national economic stimulus package.
   - Adequately invest in Oregon’s central entry point information and referral services as well as case management networks to ensure expeditious and efficient access to services for Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities.

2. **Protect Oregon’s array of home and community-based services.**

   Oregon’s long-term care system has long been lauded as a national model as a result of the state’s historical prioritization of home community-based services for Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities. Oregon’s in-home, residential care, adult foster care and assisted living providers allow Oregonians to receive services in their home or community, and reduce the state’s dependence on more expensive, restrictive care settings. As a result, the state saves millions of dollars in service costs while preserving each individual’s independence, choice and dignity. However, Oregon’s model system is in danger of eroding as the state’s commitment to these values and choices has dwindled. To preserve the wide array of service options Oregon’s seniors and people with disabilities want and need, the Legislature can:
   - Deter attempts to reduce support for Oregon’s in-home care provider network, with specific consideration for caregiver training, compensation and benefits.
   - Maintain the commitment to re-invest in Oregon’s assisted living, residential care and adult foster care providers the Legislature initiated in 2008.

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**The Real and Deep Economic Impact of Cuts**

*Source: Based on calculations from 2009 ECONorthwest study “Oregon’s Long-Term Care Sector: An Analysis of the Sector and the Economic Impacts from Potential Reductions in Funding.”*
• Fund critical programs like Oregon Project Independence that provide basic early intervention services and supports that help prevent seniors and people with disabilities from entering more restrictive and costly care settings far before it is necessary.

3. Ensure quality care and patient safety by recruiting and training a qualified, stable workforce.

Oregon’s long-term care workforce shortage is expected to exacerbate the effect of a fast-growing population of seniors and people with disabilities over the next two decades. To best prepare for the “boom” and ensure quality of care and service, Oregon must maintain and expand critical investments in its long-term care workforce development and family caregiver initiatives at all levels, including:

• Provide adequate training, compensation and benefits for Oregon's long-term care workers.
• Continue investment in increased nursing facility staffing. Not only does this help reduce turnover and ensure quality of care, it creates hundreds of new jobs.
• Provide respite programs and other resources to family caregivers who offer unpaid care for their loved ones at a great benefit to the state.

4. Improve the livability of Oregon’s communities through affordable housing, special needs transportation options, access to mental health and addictions services, and volunteer supports and services.

Regardless of whether Oregonians live in a city, a suburb, a small town, or in a rural area, the issue of livable communities is important. It’s particularly relevant for seniors and people with disabilities as they face growing challenges to independence and quality of life. Ensuring access to basic community supports can make a big difference while using state dollars more efficiently to serve those in need:

• Support a range of transportation options to help ease mobility and promote independence.
• Ensure affordable, appropriate housing options that serve all levels, including:
  • Bolster better access to mental health and addictions services for underserved populations like seniors and people with disabilities. Few, if any, options exist within the current system for these Oregonians, who often face higher affliction rates due to factors like loss, transition and mobility.
  • Sustain volunteer programs, including RSVP and Senior Health Information Benefits Assistance (SHIBA), that provide older Oregonians a way to stay connected to their communities, give back and make a difference.

The Power of Federal Matching Funds

“We’re Hiring!” Nearly 300 nursing assistant jobs are being created and filled across the state thanks to Oregon leaders harnessing a combination of increased federal stimulus dollars and state funds to help improve nursing facility safety and quality. This is just one example of the opportunity federal matching funds can provide and the smart investments the state can make - even in the face of economic crisis - that provides both short and long-term benefits for Oregonians. Leveraging $8 to $10 million of federal funds with just $3 to $4 million in state funds to help keep our seniors and people with disabilities safe was “just the kind of offer Oregon couldn’t and shouldn’t refuse,” said Dr. Bruce Goldberg, director of the Oregon Department of Human Services.

“Cuts to Oregon’s long-term care sector would send money back to the federal treasury and result in job losses in communities across the state.”

John Tapogna, Managing Director, Econorthwest
“The scope of the anticipated cuts is unprecedented and will decimate our system of support for seniors and people with disabilities. Without these critical services, many seniors will be forced to give up their homes and likely end up in more costly skilled nursing facilities, long before they require that level of care.”

MYA CHAMBERLIN, SENIOR PROGRAM DIRECTOR, FRIENDLY HOUSE, WHICH ADMINISTERS OREGON PROJECT INDEPENDENCE AND DIRECTS CLIENTS TO MEDICAID PROGRAMS.

86% of Oregonians feel it’s important for the state to keep its current long-term care system, even in the face of a tough economy and budget cuts.

DAVIS, HIBBITTS & MIDGHALL RESEARCH, DECEMBER 2008

Rather than living in his apartment with minimal in-home supports, drastic budget cuts may force Robert Joyce, 69, a former clinical psychologist who suffered cognitive and physical impairments after a car accident, to seek out more costly facility-based care. Such action would not only forgo his personal choice and independence, but it would cost the state and taxpayers far more.

ROBERT JOYCE MAY BE ONE OF THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF OREGON SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AT RISK.

REAL JOBS

“If I didn’t have my job as a caregiver, I would probably be sitting on the street. If the people that I take care of lose their services, I have no idea where I’d go from there.”

PHYLLIS WILLS, WASHINGTON COUNTY CAREGIVER

About Us

We’re an alliance of diverse organizations representing business, labor, consumers and other concerned Oregonians working together to help policy makers realize the tremendous long-term care system Oregon has and the ways to preserve and strengthen it. We believe the time is now to protect, renew and reinvest in this visionary, efficient and cost-saving system and promise for seniors and people with disabilities to age with independence, choice and dignity.

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