
NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 23, 2004

Contact: Holly Lubart

(717) 221-7935

PHCA Commends Administration's Hearings on State Aging Plan Says Questions Remain About Various Aspects of "Rebalancing Initiative"

*"Re-Balancing" Must be Two-Way Street With Commitment
Towards Achieving More Uniform Quality, Training Standards.*

Reading, PA – Testifying before a Pennsylvania Department of Aging hearing, the President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association (PHCA) praised the Administration's major effort to include public comment on the proposed state aging plan, and noted there remain several open questions regarding the "rebalancing initiative" designed to provide low income seniors in Pennsylvanians more home-based long term care options.

"PHCA strongly backs the Administration's rebalancing effort because providing consumers with more options for receiving long term care services is sound, intelligent and responsible public policy," stated Alan G. Rosenbloom, President of the PHCA. "The scope and innovative nature of the Community Choice pilot program in Philadelphia, Fayette, Washington and Greene counties are an impressive start – and we offer our suggestions and comments in a constructive, positive manner."

Rosenbloom said PHCA is committed to helping expand home and community based care through this long term care "re-balancing" effort, but expressed concerns that adversarial relationships could needlessly develop in what can be perceived as a "less than zero sum battle" for resources in the face of growing need.

"We have concerns there has yet to be a clear appreciation for the acuity of need required by most nursing home residents, and no specific acknowledgement that, for many of our most frail elderly, facility-based care is and will remain the best choice to meet their needs," stated Rosenbloom.

The PHCA President and CEO said that despite hopes community-based efforts will be less costly than facility-based care in the long term, this has yet to be established as fact either in Pennsylvania or in other states. He said a study conducted by the Urban Institute states "there is substantial, rigorous research to suggest that expanding home care is more likely to increase rather than decrease total long-term care costs."

He also noted that while Canadian research finds home care costs more, and that health outcomes are better overall in facility-based care, the state of Oregon, a national leader in community choice experimentation, is experiencing the negative aspects associated with the so-called "woodwork effect," whereby higher demand for in-home services is resulting in progressively higher government health care costs.

Rosenbloom said another key aspect of the debate – thus far unresolved -- include ensuring equal, uniform consumer protections are provided across the spectrum of long term care, and a need to mandate that education and training requirements are universal, regardless of care setting.

"As new and effective quality improvement and consumer protection initiatives are now integral to facility-based care, accountability for quality standards must also be an inherent, logical part of home-and-community-based expansion," Rosenbloom continued. "'Re-balancing' must be a two-way street in which movement towards home based care options requires a parallel, across the board commitment towards more uniform care standards."

Rosenbloom noted a new poll of 650 likely Pennsylvania voters conducted by Susquehanna Polling Research, which finds:

- 89% say the state should require the same training and education requirements for home care workers as it does for nursing home employees.
- 94% support legislation ensuring home health workers undergo the same criminal background check now applied to nursing home employees.

Rosenbloom offered several recommendations, including:

- Modify presentation in final Aging plan and elsewhere to offer a more balanced perspective on current long term care delivery system, and to clarify the goal is to develop a more integrated and balanced system of long term care services;
- Acknowledge the need to balance consumer choice with consumer protection across all settings in implementation of rebalancing;
- Establish and publicize a quality oversight and improvement effort that draws upon “lessons learned” from HCBS efforts in other states -- and develop it so consumers ultimately receive useful comparative information across care settings;
- Acknowledge the importance of the long term care work force not only to the success of the rebalancing initiative, but also to the ability to meet the demand for services looming on the horizon.

PHCA is a statewide membership services organization representing more than 325 long-term care and senior service providers throughout the Commonwealth. Additional information about PHCA is available by calling 717-221-1800 or visiting www.phca.org.

PHCA is a statewide membership services organization representing more than 325 long-term care and senior service providers throughout the Commonwealth. Additional information about PHCA is available by calling 717-221-1800 or visiting www.phca.org.

#####