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Pa. underfunding of Medicaid hurts nursing homes | Letter



Nearly two out of three nursing home residents in Pennsylvania rely on Medicaid to pay for their care. *(Photo provided Lukas Keapproth)*

By Express-Times Letters to the Editor
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Every year the news media does stories about the latest government ratings of nursing facilities. It's understandable, given we want to know what the best facilities are for our loved ones.

But ratings don't tell the whole story. If government wants to give an accurate grade, officials should start looking at how they've funded Medicaid over the past decade because we're approaching a crisis.

Pennsylvania has the [fourth-largest population of people older than 85](#) in the U.S. The need for services including nursing facilities is exploding, yet Pennsylvania isn't keeping pace with health care inflation. In fact, Pennsylvania has failed to provide an increase on three occasions, including flat-funding the current state budget.

As a result, facilities lose \$20 to \$25 per day for every Medicaid resident in their care. Nearly two out of every three residents rely on Medicaid, which equates to a loss that makes it impossible for facilities to keep up, let alone improve.

Pennsylvania can begin to address this by taking two steps this year. First, Medicaid funding must be increased by at least 3.5 percent in the 2016-17 budget. Second, it must fully fund the Medical Assistance Day One Incentive, a program created to help preserve access to care for vulnerable seniors on Medicaid.

For a decade, facilities have been asked to do more with less and are graded without regard to funding cuts. It's time to make seniors a priority in this budget and give facilities the resources necessary to achieve their mission.

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