

SCRANTON Times Tribune

Make seniors priority

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Editor: Every year, the media does stories about the latest government ratings of nursing facilities. It's understandable given that 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 have funded Medicaid over the past decade because we're approaching a crisis.

Pennsylvania has the fourth-largest population of people older than age 85 in the nation. The need for services, including nursing facilities, is exploding; yet Pennsylvania does not keep pace with health care inflation. In fact, Pennsylvania has failed to provide an increase on three occasions, including flat funding in the current state budget.

As a result, many 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, Pennsylvania 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.

RONALD BARTH
LEADINGAGE PA,
MECHANICSBURG

W. RUSSELL McDAID
PENNSYLVANIA HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION
HARRISBURG

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