

Make seniors a priority

Jun 19, 2016

Every year, the 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 been funded by 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 2 out of every 3 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 (MDOI), 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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http://www.dailyitem.com/opinion/make-seniors-a-priority/article_3caa8103-ec73-5d01-bb15-f9954b0929ec.html