

Thursday, April 7, 2011

## **Editorial: Rightsize it**

### ***Lawmakers should continue effort to give seniors care options***

<http://www.dispatch.com/live/content/editorials/stories/2011/04/07/rightsize-it.html?sid=101>

Gov. John Kasich's proposed budget for 2012-13 is justified in seeking a reduction in the disproportionate funding that nursing homes have commanded for years.

That legislators are getting pressure from the nursing-home industry over the proposed cut is no surprise; the industry's lobby has deep pockets and wide influence, having contributed heavily to politicians of both parties.

But lawmakers should not back down from this long-overdue adjustment.

Ohio's \$8 billion deficit means virtually every area of government spending must see cutbacks, but nursing-home spending is a candidate for substantial cuts because it has been out of whack for years.

Among the elderly and people who otherwise need long-term care, not everyone needs to be in a nursing home, and many prefer not to be. But Ohio budgets for decades have spent a much larger percentage of the funding available for long-term care on nursing homes, compared with other states. The imbalance was easy to see; subsidized nursing-home beds went empty, while people who wanted the less-expensive option of in-home care or assisted living spent were consigned to waiting lists for lack of funding.

Some of the savings from the nursing-home cut should go to provide more of the alternative care that previously has been in short supply.

Adjustments over the years haven't erased the imbalance. Even though the state's Medicaid payment rate for nursing homes was held flat for six years, it remained seventh-highest in the nation last year.

Ohio also ranked seventh in per-person expenditures for nursing-home care; by contrast, for per-person expenditures for in-home and community-based care, it ranked 32<sup>nd</sup>.

Of the total spent for long-term care, Ohio spends 72 percent on nursing homes - ninth-highest in the country. The national average is 59 percent.

An executive order last year by former Gov. Ted Strickland, moving some money from the nursing-home fund into PASSPORT, the state program that provides seniors with help to live at home, was a welcome corrective that helped clear the waiting list at the time.

Kasich's budget continues the rebalancing effort, in part by consolidating all funds for long-term care into a single line item, instead of allocating so much for nursing homes and so much for other alternatives. This dilutes the ability of the nursing-home lobby to lock in however much funding it can wrest from compliant legislators. It gives state officials the flexibility to spend the money where it is needed, according to what long-term-care recipients want.

Given how many of them want in-home care or assisted living, but couldn't get it under previous budgets because of the built-in bias toward nursing homes, the change should save taxpayers money and better serve seniors.

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