

Who Will Care for the Baby Boomers?

The Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island is strongly supporting pending legislation (House Bill H7670) in the Rhode Island General Assembly that will provide significant rate increases in Medicaid reimbursement for homecare provider agencies for their delivery of both personal care and skilled nursing and therapeutic care services. We need to start now to begin increasing the numbers of workers providing per-

On the Senior Agenda



By William F. Flynn Jr.

sonal care (bathing, toileting, cooking, and assistance with mobility) as well as skilled nursing and physical therapeutic care for seniors and persons living with disabilities. The “age wave” of baby boomers has arrived. Compared to previous generations of seniors, we will have fewer adult children to help with our care, and

many of them live many miles away. In 2021 baby boomers begin turning 75, and a third of them will eventually need long-term care at some point before the end of their lives.

Yet as the need for more workers to provide home care services is growing, senior homecare recipients and their families report increasing homecare worker turnover and longer wait times for agencies to provide them with homecare workers. For many years in testimony before the General Assembly’s Finance Committees, homecare agency directors have been saying that low state Medicaid reimbursement rates are making it harder to recruit and retain both so-called unskilled workers like CNA’s and homemakers, as well as nurses and physical therapists. In re-

cent years state reimbursement rates have “passed through” modest increases for unskilled workers, but even those haven’t kept pace with labor market

homes. As an article in *Generations*, the Journal of the American Society on Aging, put it, “Often, what’s most critical to an older adult’s well-being is human

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wage rates for much less challenging jobs like coffee shop workers. State Medicaid reimbursement rates for home care provided by nurses and other therapeutic specialists now lag Massachusetts, which just increased its rates, by \$15 an hour. These providers can earn more in Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as in Rhode Island nursing homes.

We know that seniors and their families strongly value being able to build a relationship with the care providers coming into their

interaction. Despite its significance, this work is often referred to as ‘unskilled’ or ‘companionship’...such labels undervalue the skills required and duties performed.” We also hear from some individual homecare providers that they actually prefer providing care in the home and building those relationships---but only if they receive competitive wages and benefits.

Most seniors, even if they have chronic health issues, have a very strong desire to age in the community with independence and dignity.

with dignity in their wages and working conditions. Otherwise there will not be nearly enough homecare workers to care for our seniors and persons living with disabilities. Please ask your state legislators to pass H7670.

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