

C4A

Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Inc.

Testimony – Human Services Committee 2/26/08

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Positions

- **Senate Bill 34, An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations with Respect to Social Services Programs**
 - C4A **supports** Section 6, which proposes to amend the state Medicaid plan to include hospice services
 - C4A **supports** Section 9, which proposes to allow use of special needs trusts under the Aid to Aged, Blind and Disabled Program to reduce the countable income of certain individuals who live in residential care homes
 - C4A **opposes** Section 1, which proposes to eliminate funding for foreign language interpreters under the Medicaid program
 - C4A **opposes** Section 2, which proposes to permit DSS to use a more restrictive definition of the term “medical necessity”
- **House Bill 5021 – An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2009:**
 - C4A **opposes** the proposal to eliminate the \$1 million in funding to the CHOICES program for SFY’09
 - C4A **opposes** proposed cuts to non-entitlement funding including the Elderly Services line of the Department of Social Services budget, which will reduce funding available for home-delivered and congregate meals and reduce or eliminate state funding for such initiatives as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program.

- C4A **respectfully urges** the legislature to:
 - increase reimbursement rates to all providers of home and community-based services;
 - appropriate additional funding for the Connecticut Home Care Program for the Disabled; and
 - increase income eligibility for Medicaid coverage under the Aged, Blind and Disabled Program from 60% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 185% of the FPL.

Background

Funding for the CHOICES Program

Connecticut's program for Health Insurance Assistance, Outreach, Information & Assistance, Counseling, and Eligibility Screening (CHOICES) is a multi-faceted and collaborative initiative among the five Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's), the Department of Social Services Aging, Community and Social Work Division (ACSW), the Center for Medicare Advocacy (CMA) and numerous community partners, including senior centers.

CHOICES provides health insurance counseling and information & assistance to older adults, those with disabilities, and caregivers. This service helps people to understand and plan for their long-term care needs. CHOICES is not just about Medicare!

CHOICES:

➤ **helps people to make good long-term care choices**

Both the Connecticut Long-Term Care Needs Assessment and the Connecticut Long-Term Care Plan confirm that people need more information to plan for their long-term care needs.

➤ **helps both older adults and those with disabilities**

CHOICES is the model on which DSS is building Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC's) to serve both older adults and those with disabilities.

➤ **is an unbiased source**

CHOICES provides older consumers and their caregivers with unbiased, current and comprehensive information.

➤ **helps thousands of people every year**

In 2007 alone, CHOICES:

- helped over **33,000** individuals and caregivers to navigate the Medicare Part D benefit;

- assisted over **10,000** individuals with questions on financial assistance, benefits, housing, adult day care and services for people with disabilities
- sponsored **330** outreach presentations
- provided **meaningful volunteer opportunities** to **373** trained counselors
- provided **expert training** to social services professionals to help them keep current
- used radio, cable television, billboards, local newspapers and expert materials from the Center for Medicare Advocacy and other sources to educate the public

Ongoing, 1) increasing public knowledge of CHOICES; 2) changes in the health care system; 3) strain on family caregivers; and 4) emerging long-term care needs of younger individuals with disabilities are certain to result in significant growth in demand for the program that can only be accommodated through financial support from the State of Connecticut.

Funding for the Elderly Nutrition Program

State Match and State Supplemental funds for home-delivered and congregate meal programs are provided through the “Elderly Services” line item of the Department of Social Services budget. These critical funds are inadequate to meet the growing demand in Connecticut. Home-delivered meals are an essential long term care support for frail, homebound elders. Each meal represents a vital source of balanced nutrition, a social connection with the delivery person, and an essential element of preventative health. Congregate meals have similar nutritional benefits. Research shows that frail, underweight individuals eat larger portions and more varied diets in group settings, and that overweight individuals tend to eat more moderately than they would at home. Most importantly, all attendees experience measurable psycho-social benefits from eating in a group setting.

In 2007:

- 27,000 older adults received 2,504,784 meals through the Connecticut Elderly Nutrition Program (1,520,853 home-delivered meals and 983,931 congregate meals)
- Since 2004, Connecticut’s allotment of federal Older Americans Act nutrition funds has increased by less than 1% and federal NSIP funding has decreased by over 4%.
- Given that federal funding levels have not increased, additional State funding of \$800,000 was appropriated in SFY’s 08 and 09.
- Without retention of this additional financial support from the State, programs faced with hard realities of increased staffing, gas and other operating costs will otherwise be forced to reduce the number of people served.

Rate Increases for Home and Community-Based Providers

Data from professional groups including the Connecticut Home Care Association and the Connecticut Association for Adult Day Care indicate that Medicaid reimbursement rates to providers of home and community-based services have not kept pace with increased costs of doing business (e.g. staff recruitment and retention, insurance and quality assurance/ regulatory compliance efforts). Inadequacy of reimbursement has directly contributed to closure of many home care agencies and adult day care centers over the last five years, just when expansion of the available service array is most needed by both older adults and individuals with disabilities. C4A strongly supports measures intended to increase reimbursement rates to its partners in the network.