



## **Advocates see \$500 million in Medicaid savings with home care**

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By **Catherine Candisky**

### **THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH**

Advocates for Ohio seniors say the state could save \$500 million in the next two-year budget by spending less on nursing homes and more on home-care services for those on Medicaid.

Responding to a call from Gov. John Kasich for ideas to close a projected \$8 billion budget shortfall, Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging have launched an Internet-based campaign, Fair Care Ohio, to promote the less-expensive long-term care option.

"Ohio can save an estimated \$500 million over the next two-year budget period by balancing its long-term care spending 50-50 between nursing homes and in-home care," said Larke Recchie, director of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Currently, about 58 percent of Medicaid-eligible Ohioans older than 60 and receiving long-term care are in nursing homes, while 42 percent receive in-home and community-based services.

"That's much better than it used to be, but Ohio's seniors and taxpayers deserve a better deal," Recchie said. Advocates say most seniors want to live at home as long as possible, and state leaders have the opportunity to provide services that give them that option while saving scarce tax dollars.

Medicaid, the state-federal tax-funded health-care program covering more than 2 million poor and disabled Ohioans, pays about \$52,000 a year, on average, for a person in nursing-home care, compared with \$19,000 for home care, so the savings can be significant.

The Governor's Office of Health Transformation is putting together the administration's plan for overhauling Medicaid in the next budget. Long-term care is one area getting a close look because nursing-home costs make up nearly 20 percent of program costs, second only to hospital care. The governor must present his proposed budget to the legislature by March 15.

To achieve better balance, advocates say the state must keep enrollment in home-care services open and step up efforts to help seniors return home after they are hospitalized or receive rehabilitation services in a nursing home. Such help might ensure that they follow up with their doctors, take their medications and get good nutrition.

"You plant the seed early that they can return home," Recchie said.

But program design has made shifting costs harder than it seems. While federal guidelines require states to pay for nursing-home care, home-care services are optional and often the first to be cut when state budgets are tight.

U.S. regulators, however, recently announced that beginning in October the federal government will pay a greater share of home- and community-based long-term-care services to encourage states to offer them. More information about the campaign can be found at [www.faircareohio.org](http://www.faircareohio.org).

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**About the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging | o4a**

The Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a), a nonprofit organization, is a statewide network of agencies that provide services for older adults, their families and caregivers, as well as advocate on their behalf. The Association addresses issues that have an impact on the aging network, provides services to members, and serves as a collective voice for Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Equal Opportunity Employer/Provider. For more information visit, [www.ohioaging.org](http://www.ohioaging.org).

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