

# In-home elder care makes sense

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More Ohioans *will* be eligible - but for fewer services

There are only four reasons you should care about what's being proposed for Ohio's long-term-care programs for senior citizens and people with disabilities:

You plan to live a long time.

Your parents will live a long time.

You could sustain a disabling injury or illness.

You're helping to foot the state's \$18 billion Medicaid bill.

Those of you still reading should know that Ohio is about to make critical budget

decisions that will determine where - and therefore how - you age.

Over the last 20 years, Ohio has gotten much smarter about the choices it offers aging citizens. In the 1990s, 90 percent of those in Medicaid long-term-care programs - seniors who had exhausted their own savings - ended up in nursing homes. Today, 42 percent are in homes or community settings. That shift has saved billions and kept more Ohioans in settings that are the cheapest and happiest for them.

To his credit, Gov. John Kasich sees the sense in reducing Ohio's over-reliance on nursing home care. He's called for a 15

percent increase in PASS-PORT, the state's in-home-care program. The 35,589 Ohioans already receiving services like baths, house-keeping and medical transportation to help them remain in their homes will grow to 41,462.

Now the rub: Budget proposals also call for significant cuts to those services, and a reduction in the number of case managers who make the

system work.

Services would be cut 8 percent next year and 15 percent in 2013. The number of case managers would shrink from 548 to 469 even as the number of clients grows by 5,800.

It doesn't make sense to tout the program, then pull out the resources that make it work.

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Krista Ramsey

## Care: Options to nursing home needed

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Good senior care - like visits by home health-care aides - has significant ancillary benefits, including a more productive workplace.

Nearly a third of adult workers care for an elderly relative, a responsibility that translates to \$29 billion in lost workplace productivity.

Support services are the caregivers' backup. They provide a second set of eyes to identify emerging health problems and care that pre-

vents accidents, ensures good nutrition, and increases mobility and social interaction.

Ohio's expansion of these services has been a long time coming, and is still behind the national curve. Its spending on nursing home care is still ninth-highest in the nation. Meanwhile, only eight states devote less to in-home care.

Cutting services will almost surely force more seniors into nursing homes even if they don't need the high-skilled, expensive care.

Maintaining at least the

current level of services is important not only for the current generation of older Ohioans, but for the growing group of baby boomers to come.

A MetLife survey on long-term care shows that most Americans resist planning for their advanced years. Nearly 90 percent of seniors say they've never discussed with family how they'll pay for care or what care options they prefer. While nearly 70 percent of Americans will need long-term care at some point, only 35 percent believe they will.

Easily accessible, high-quality and affordable care options can't be put together quickly. Middle-aged Ohioans won't be able to snap their fingers and have them in place when they need them.

For the last 20 years, Ohio has slowly been building toward good later-life care options. Now isn't the time to shrink our choices.

*Krista Ramsey's column appears Friday and Sunday.*