



Senior Tar Heel Legislature

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Funding Changes Will Affect Services for Older Adults in North Carolina *State Leaders Share a Clearer Picture as State Budget Takes Form*

Raleigh, NC – State leaders hope to offer increased support to older adults in the community and save money within the health care system starting in July. During the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) meeting in Raleigh, delegates and alternates were briefed on Medicaid reform and plans for expanding Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty). Unfortunately, the expansion of one program might mean possible cuts in another vital program.

Keynote speaker, Dr. Aldona Wos, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in North Carolina, shared her history with the audience. “I’ve travelled around the world and observed different forms of governments, and I can tell you there is no perfect health care system in the world and there is nothing in the world that is for free.” North Carolina leaders are making Medicaid reform a top priority because of its massive cost and drain on other programs and agencies in the state. Currently, Medicaid, the public health care system, costs the state 36 million dollars a day. Secretary Wos identified three Medicaid modifications; create a system that is sustainable and predictable in its cost, provide a better Information Technology (IT) system that reduces bureaucratic burden on health care providers, and provide medical care for the patient as a whole.

Secretary Wos hopes to “create a system of care where seniors are supported where ever they choose to live,” and was pleased with Governor Pat McCrory leadership in allocating \$500,000 for Project C.A.R.E. Governor McCrory appointed Dr. Wos to lead DHHS starting in 2013. According to her biography, Dr. Wos declined her salary of nearly \$130,000 and instead accepted \$1.

Dennis Streets, Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) reported on state budget developments and its implications for services for older adults. The General Assembly has proposed to transfer a portion of Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) funds to expand Project C.A.R.E. This program is designed to offer respite care and support for loved ones and family members who care for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. This support can help the individual stay in the home longer rather than being placed in an institution. If the \$500,000 is approved, DAAS will be well positioned to offer the program in all 100 counties.

Unfortunately, the House and Senate’s proposed reduction in funding for the HCCBG could mean fewer services funded by the block grant which include nutrition, transportation, adult day care, legal aide, housing improvements, and in-home aide services. Streets stated “there’s nothing to give up in the block grant, right now there are 16,000 seniors who are waiting for services that are funded by the grant.” In addition, nearly 60% of

county aging service providers face a reduction in funding. Streets added that both the HCCBG and Project C.A.R.E. are vital programs and it is “unfortunate to choose which one to support.”

Senator Stan Bingham, North Carolina General Assembly, updated the group on Senate Bill 140 – Financial Exploitation of Older Adults. The bill is a result of a task force formed of members from the Department of Justice, State Bureau of Investigation, and the Commissioner of Banking. According to Senator Bingham, North Carolina ranks high for scams that target older adults including health insurance fraud, counterfeit prescription drug fraud, funeral scams, lottery, investment, and telemarketing scams. In addition, more than 90% of older adults are scammed by family members. The task force will continue to meet and notify banks of scams and work to update laws. Senate Bill 140 has passed the Senate and is currently in the House.

On a lighter note, the Friends of the Senior Tar Heels is one step closer to launching the new website! The site contains information about the STHL including its history, contact information, priorities, press releases, and links to helpful sites. The site should be ready within the next few weeks.

The 2013 legislative priorities for the NCSTHL include: 1) Maintain funding for senior centers; 2) Restore funding to sustain Project C.A.R.E.; 3) Mandate pre-employment and random drug testing for employees of nursing, adult care homes, and adult day care facilities; 4) Strengthen and fund North Carolina’s Adult Protective Services Program; 5) Recurring funds of at least \$7 million for the Home and Community Care Block Grant.

One delegate and one alternate represent every older adult in the state’s 100-counties. Please feel free to contact your local delegate or the regional Area Agency on Aging. The next STHL meeting will be October 2013.