

2015 Session Outlook

Addressing Unfinished Business and Retooling Our Advocacy Strategy

In reviewing the outcomes of the 2013 and 2014 biennium, the Minnesota Legislature approved a majority of what Aging Services of Minnesota set out to accomplish. Nevertheless, it remains frustrating that even in the context of a budget surplus and a majority party that was willing to raise revenues, lawmakers failed to fully deliver adequate, sustainable funding for the continuum of senior care. The unfinished business of these past two legislative sessions leaves an unsettling picture of what the future holds for senior care providers in Minnesota, and makes it that much more important that we work together over the interim and during the 2015 legislative session to make significant progress in addressing our issues.

Our work in the next several months and during the 2015 session will be framed by our take-aways from this past session:

- **Even as more and more of our members are providing a full continuum of services to seniors, legislators are funding silos.** The idea that segments of senior care should "take turns" being funded - care centers one year and Elderly Waiver the next - fails to recognize that we take care of seniors in all the places they call home every year. This "taking turns" approach helps legislators manage their budget targets, but is no way to ensure quality care for seniors across the continuum.
- **The payment system for older adult services is not only fragmented, but payments to providers are unpredictable from year to year and lack a planful mechanism to recognize increasing costs.** Each year we pick a number for a payment increase, the Governor picks a number and the Legislature picks a number and then we fight it out to the last hours of the session. Four times in the last five years, the number we ended up with was zero or worse. Legislators were somewhat stunned - and then a little angry - that care centers asked for another increase this year after receiving five percent last year. Yet if you take into account the freezes and cuts to both care centers and Elderly Waiver over the past five years against the five percent increases each received this biennium, it amounts to a less than one percent increase each year. We have been told that legislators are tired of hearing us talk about our funding crisis and, as advocates for our employees and residents, we grow weary of this annual battle as well.
- **Coalitions can yield powerful results and caregivers matter.** In the past two years, we saw the power of working together with other stakeholder groups like unions, consumer advocates and other long term care providers. We also saw powerful and pioneering media coverage of challenges of caregiving, and the incredible talent and dedication of our caregiving corps. And we saw legislators from both parties step up to champion the "angels" who provide direct care in our assisted living, care center and home-based settings. Almost everyone who has had a loved one need long term care or support has a story about an exceptional caregiver - and it is these stories that help us capture not just the minds of policymakers but the hearts of the public.

- **One of our biggest assets in advocacy is our statewide presence and the bipartisan nature of our issues - and we likely have not tapped either of these assets to the extent we can.** Over the course of this summer, you will see new strategy emerge about how we leverage our statewide reach in terms of participation in the unfolding political campaigns combined with a new public information campaign that reaches every Minnesotan with three simple but profound messages:
 - **Aging Minnesotans should receive the care they need to live independently for as long as possible.**
 - **Aging Minnesotans should receive safe and quality care from experienced caregivers.**
 - **Care and support of aging Minnesotans should be a shared responsibility of individuals, families and government.**

Recent public opinion polling tells us these statements reflect the beliefs of a majority of Minnesotans today. The work that lies ahead is to translate that belief into action.

Elections

Governor Dayton and all 134 members of the House will be spending their summer door-knocking and fundraising as they seek re-election in November. Dayton and the House Democrats spent the session trying to position themselves to win this fall. They will likely run on their many successes of the past two years – an improved economy, tax increases on the wealthiest 2%, the minimum wage increase, WESA, property tax relief and the legalization of gay marriage. In addition, Dayton is likely to point to his leadership on the Vikings Stadium issue as an example of his ability to deliver even when faced with GOP legislative majorities. That point could be an important one, as the GOP has a chance to take back the majority in the House this year. The Republicans will try to highlight the risks of one-party government and accuse the Democrats of overreaching, overtaxing and overspending. In the end the election will all come down to whose message most resonates with voters and a lot can happen between now and November.

Interim Policy Work

Campaigns and door knocking won't be the only thing that keeping policymakers busy this summer and fall. There are many interim work groups and studies that we are watching. As a result of discussions during the session, we expect to be further discussions with regard to dementia training requirements in housing with services settings and also work with the Department of Human Services with regard to size and setting restrictions for home and community based service providers. In addition, we are closely watching whether the Level of Care changes will be implemented.

All of these efforts could result in legislation in the 2015 session.

The 2015 is scheduled to begin on January 6th.