

## **Media Relations**

### **Background and Strategy**

Aging Services of Minnesota focused its 2014 messaging strategy on the “unfinished business” of the 2013 legislative session. This included rate increases for care centers and home and community-based services, enhanced dementia training requirements, and increased consumer protection. Aging Services also introduced a workforce development agenda to help raise awareness of and engage lawmakers in the caregiving crisis in long term care.

In addition to promoting its own legislative agenda, Aging Services helped coordinate communication efforts for The 5% Campaign. The 5% Campaign is a nonpartisan coalition comprised of more than 100 organizations representing older adults and people with disabilities working together to secure a five percent rate increase for home and community-based services in the 2014 legislative session.

While the media relations campaign primarily focused on the legislative agenda, Aging Services also enhanced its efforts to elevate support for developing a more predictable, sustainable payment model that meets the evolving needs of senior care today and in the future.

### **Themes and Key Messages**

The media relations strategy this session focused on three key words: investment, quality and workforce. To educate lawmakers on our legislative priorities, Aging Services highlighted the following themes and key messages:

- **Invest in Quality of Life for Seniors**
  - A state investment in caregiving will support adequate services throughout Minnesota, so people can live in their communities as long as possible and guarantee that all aging Minnesotans are receiving safe and quality care from experienced caregivers.
- **Increase Quality in Long Term Care Communities**
  - Ensuring a better quality of life for Minnesota’s seniors is the number one priority for long term care providers. Increased training requirements will help provide quality care and safe environments for those who cannot live independently, either temporarily or for the rest of their lives.
- **Creating a Stable, Experienced Workforce**
  - The workforce crisis in long term care is not a health and human services problem, it is a statewide issue that if not resolved could impact the quality of life for seniors today and in the future. An integrated approach of education, training and funding will help retain current team members, attract new individuals to the field of senior care and establish career ladders for individuals in older adult services.

## **Social Media**

Aging Services again utilized Facebook and Twitter to keep its members, lawmakers, stakeholders and influencers informed of legislative progress this session. Highlights of the social media campaign included photos featuring caregivers and residents asking lawmakers to make them a priority and updates from the annual Aging Services Day at the Capitol. In addition, Aging Services utilized its social media accounts to provide regular updates on legislative hearings, create a call to action encouraging members to engage with their lawmakers prior to key votes, and cross promote The 5% Campaign.

## **Proactive Media Outreach & Coverage**

Prior to the start of the 2014 session, the Aging Services legislative agenda received major media coverage when Almanac broadcast a three-part series on Minnesota's caregiving crisis. Almanac is the state's premiere public affairs program that is must-see weekly viewing by lawmakers, key decision makers and influential stakeholders.

- Part one focused on the work that caregiving requires, low caregiver wages, lack of sustainable funding. It featured interviews with Erin Hilligan, Campus Administrator for Ebenezer Ridges in Burnsville, and several members of her team.
- Part two focused on the Elderly Waiver program with a particular focus on the need for increased revenue to support the rising needs of the aging population, including dementia care. It featured interviews with Sue Eckstrom, Executive Director for Rahkma, and members of her team.
- Part three focused on the impact inadequate state funding has had on home and community-based services that provide care for Minnesotans with disabilities.

The 5% Campaign was heavily featured during the entire Almanac series, which helped create momentum for the campaign's proposal for a five percent rate increase for home and community-based services as lawmakers returned to the State Capitol for the 2014 legislative session.

Shortly after the legislative session began, the state received good news when the February forecast showed a \$1.2 billion budget surplus. The Long Term Care Imperative issued a statement urging lawmakers to ensure all aging Minnesotans receive safe and quality care:

*Caregivers are the cornerstone to providing quality care for older adults in our state. However, long-term care providers struggle to recruit and retain experienced, quality caregivers due to the low wages and benefits they offer, which is a direct result of inadequate state funding that has not kept pace with the state's aging population and growing need for long term care services and support. It is time for lawmakers to invest in these jobs and the caregiving profession by passing rate increases that help provide for the care Minnesota seniors need and deserve.*

Governor Mark Dayton revealed his proposed spending target shortly after the February forecast was released. While the Health and Human Services section featured the largest spending target of the 2014 session after tax relief, it failed to provide sufficient funding for The 5% Campaign or any funding for care centers. The Long Term Care Imperative released a statement expressing concern with the inadequate funding for older adult service delivery:

*Governor Mark Dayton takes a good first step toward restoring the funding of long term care for older adults by including a four percent rate increase for home and community based services in his supplemental budget. However, it falls short of the investment the state needs to make to ensure that all aging Minnesotans are receiving safe and quality care from experienced caregivers. Previous budget deficits were balanced on the backs of caregivers. Now that the state's fiscal house is in order and the state has a \$1.2 billion surplus, it is time to make a strong commitment to support seniors and their caregivers. Years of funding cuts and freezes to long term care has caused a caregiving crisis in Minnesota. Long term care providers are struggling to recruit and retain experienced, quality caregivers. We urge the Minnesota Legislature to keep their commitment to thousands of caregivers and older adults by including a five percent rate increase for home and community-based services and funding for nursing homes in their supplemental budget bill this session.*

The Minnesota House soon released its budget targets, which also failed to provide the full level of funding for The 5% Campaign and an across the board rate increase for care centers. To help put pressure on the Minnesota Senate and influence its budget priorities, Aging Services coordinated an interview with the Star Tribune that resulted in well-timed editorial titled "Support Minnesota Caregivers with Adequate Pay." The editorial cited inadequate and workforce shortages that resulted from years of budget cuts and freezes to essential home and community-based services. An excerpt from the editorial:

*"The question that The 5% Campaign poses for the larger population is whether home and community-based services will long remain widely available and worthy of Minnesotans' trust. The squeeze on these services in the past decade has eroded their quality. High turnover has become epidemic as workers find they can make more money as retail clerks than as vital caregivers to vulnerable people. Doing better by vulnerable adults and their caregivers is more than a financial question. It's a moral one."*

The Senate budget target, which was revealed shortly after the Star Tribune editorial, included full funding for The 5% Campaign as well as targeted funding for isolated and financially- challenged care centers. The Long Term Care Imperative released a statement in support of the Minnesota Senate budget target for home and community-based services but continued to call for investments in care centers and a long term solution for the broken payment system:

*The five percent rate increase for home and community-based services will help provide supportive housing environments for seniors who cannot pay for them on their own and increase the compensation of those who provide them with care. While the rate increase*

*for home and community-based services is appreciated, the Senate – like the Minnesota House and Governor Mark Dayton – fails to provide a rate increase for all nursing homes. This \$16 million investment would help increase caregiver compensation as well as close the wide funding gap that fails to compensate for the actual costs of care. In the final weeks of session, we urge the Minnesota House to join the Minnesota Senate in providing a full five percent increase to home and community-based services this session. We also look forward to working with the Minnesota Legislature in the interim on reforming a broken payment system in order to provide aging Minnesotans the care they need to preserve their quality of life in all the places they call home.*

As the session progressed, Aging Services identified the need to garner additional support for its legislative agenda as Governor Dayton and the Minnesota House did not amend their original HHS spending targets. With budget bills nearing their final passage in the Minnesota House and Senate, Aging Services joined our partner in the Long Term Care Imperative on a media tour featuring stops in Rochester, Mankato, St. Cloud and Duluth. Aging Services members Mark Robinson, The Homestead in Rochester, Jennifer Pfeiffer, Ecumen Pathways in Mankato, and Christine Bakke, St. Benedict's in St. Cloud, joined Gayle Kvenvold at three of the media interviews to provide a personal perspective on why funding matters this session.

The tour resulted in three editorials, a news story and a video testimonial, excerpts include:

**Rochester Post Bulletin Editorial (April 3, 2014): A Victory for Caregivers, But More Work Remains**

*“Demographics will force legislators to address the funding inequities soon. By 2020, Minnesota will have more people 65 and older than school-age children for the first time in history. We have little choice but to make Minnesota not only a good place to grow up, but a good place to grow old.”*

**Duluth News Tribune Editorial (April 3, 2014): Lawmakers' Work for Elderly Not Done**

*“Whether the Legislature is able to offer more to nursing homes and other long term care efforts this session, the confusion this year, the history of unpredictable and inadequate funding for something as critical as caring for our rapidly growing elderly population, and the increasingly desperate need for nurses and other workers in the industry all points to a most for innovation and change. A predictable, sustainable financing strategy would be a great place to start. Never has the need to work together and make things better for the comfort and caring of aging Minnesotans been more apparent than during the confusion of this legislative session. Action clearly is needed. So is systematic change.”*

**St. Cloud Times Long Term Care Imperative Commentary (April 16, 2014): Act for Seniors, Caregivers**

*“The challenges seniors and their caregivers face today will only exacerbate with the growth of our aging population and inadequate and unsustainable investments in care.*

*Aging knows no party affiliation, and the desire to live in the place we call home across the arc of our lives is a universal need. Let's come together and provide seniors with the dignity, options and quality of care they deserve. We need leadership now within the administration and Legislature. They should work with experienced professionals and consumers to find a sustainable funding solution for the continuum of care."*

In addition to the Long Term Care Imperative media tour, Aging Services members participated in their own media campaigns submitting commentaries or letters to the editor to local papers, and inviting media to attend meetings with lawmakers in their facilities. An excerpt from a West Central Tribune commentary written by Michelle Haefner, President/CEO of Bethesda Health and Housing, and Jim Laine, Administrator of Grace Living Community of Glen Oaks, called for immediate investments in Minnesota seniors:

*"Minnesota seniors and their caregivers have spent many years looking forward to a time where state budget woes were no longer an excuse for inaction. But neither the House nor the Senate nor the Governor are pushing for an across-the-board rate increase for nursing homes for 2014. It's not too late. We need leadership now within the administration and Legislature. We call upon our local leaders to set the tone and work like their own retirements depend on the outcome of the 2014 session. Because, it might."*

Almanac at the Capitol re-visited its caregiving crisis series from January 2014 in a 30-minute program specifically dedicated to the progress of funding bills for senior care and care for disabled Minnesotans. Within days of that program airing, the Minnesota House amended its budget proposal to include The 5% Campaign funding request and Governor Dayton also indicated his support for the legislation. However, an across the board rate increase for care centers was still not part of the budget negotiations. The Long Term Care Imperative released a statement hours before the Governor's State of the State Address to request a sustainable commitment to care centers in addition to the funding already included in the 2014 budget proposal:

*"Nursing homes have managed chronic underfunding and double-digit increases in expenditures for nearly a decade. Today, even with a much needed five percent rate increase approved last session, nursing homes are turning away residents because they cannot afford to recruit and train the competent staff needed to provide quality care to Minnesota's more vulnerable and fragile seniors. This year the people who provide seniors with care when they care no longer take care of themselves, have been told it's 'not their turn' for an investment. When you say no to adequate and sustainable funding for nursing homes, you are saying no to elderly care. With a \$1.2 billion budget surplus, it is time to invest \$16 million in quality caregivers in Minnesota's nursing homes. We are asking Governor Dayton to step up and fund adequate care."*

The 2014 legislative session ended with a majority of the Aging Services legislative agenda signed into law, including a five percent rate increase for home and community-based services, \$5.5 million in targeted care center funding and policy reforms in the area of dementia training and consumer protection.

Aging Services was disappointed the Minnesota Legislature and Governor Dayton did not fully fund our proposals for the entire continuum of care during the 2014 legislative session. However, the media relations campaign did achieve its goal to raise awareness of the funding challenges in long term care. By the time the 2014 session came to a close, many lawmakers agreed that the long term care financing system is broken in and in need of a fix.