

## Florida's elderly deserve long-term funding

By Karen Kallen-Zury  
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A well-run nursing home can be a comfortable, nurturing place for an elderly person. One of the inescapable elements of quality of care is the staffing level of the nursing home. There is no way around it — caring for the elderly is a time-intensive service, and study after study has shown that reducing staffing levels has a direct impact on quality of care.

That's why it's so important that we look for a long-term solution to providing adequate care for Florida's elderly population.

For many Florida families, Medicaid is a necessity to help pay for nursing home care, making Medicaid funding a vital part of our infrastructure for caring for the elderly.

This year, Florida's nursing homes dodged a bullet when the Florida Legislature agreed to offset a 10 percent Medicaid rate cut with a formula for drawing more federal funding similar to that used by hospitals. It's a complex formula where a quality assessment fee is paid by nursing homes, which ends up giving them access to more federal Medicaid dollars.

Medicaid is a state program in all states, but each state runs its program in its own way. Other states have accessed federal matching dollars, as Florida now intends to do, but those that didn't wait for the federal government to approve their assessment program lost funding, so this program really isn't final until it's approved.

This solution keeps nursing homes from having to make cuts that would compromise care — at least for the next year. It's a good solution, but not a very permanent one. Staffing ratios need to continue to be funded by the state's Medicaid cost reimbursement program.

In the coming years, it will become harder to meet the demands of an aging population. Aging Baby Boomers will put a tremendous strain on Florida's nursing homes.

Adequate care for our elderly is a fundamental expense. It will continue to be an issue in Florida until we find a better long-term solution.

We may not like to think too much about it, but many of us — about one in four — will eventually receive care in a nursing home environment, either for rehabilitation or as a resident. For our community, for our parents or for ourselves, we ought to take a fresh look at how Florida provides funding for nursing home care.

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