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Contact

HCA: Roger L. Noyes (518) 810-0665
NYAHS: Dan Heim (518) 449-2707, ext. 128
HANYS: William Van Slyke (518) 431-7770
HCP: Travis Wattie (518) 463-1118, ext. 832

Allied Health Care Organizations Urge Support of Long Term Home Health Care Program Measure

Bill introduced by Senator Hannon in collaboration with joint health care associations would enhance LTHHCP patient access and program operation

The Home Care Association of New York State (HCA), Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS), New York Association of Homes & Services for the Aging (NYAHS) and New York State Association of Health Care Providers (HCP) today urged support by the Legislature and Governor for a bill (S.8092) recently introduced by Senate Health Committee Chairman Kemp Hannon to enhance New York's Long Term Home Health Care Program (LTHHCP).

"HCA and our allied associations are extremely grateful for Senator Hannon's sponsorship and collaboration with the health care community in developing this critical roadmap to strengthen and sustain long-term home health care services for New Yorkers in greatest need," said HCA President Joanne Cunningham.

HANYS' President Daniel Sisto said: "The Long Term Home Health Care Program has a long and successful track record of providing enormous financial and human value by avoiding nursing home care, shortening hospital stays, and allowing more New Yorkers to stay in their homes and communities. HANYS strongly supports Senator Hannon's plan to update and enhance the LTHHCP to better serve New Yorkers."

NYAHS President Carl S. Young said: "The LTHHCP is a critically important, time-tested program that allows thousands of New Yorkers of all ages to receive an array of services and remain in their own homes. Further enhancements to the program, such as those proposed by Senator Hannon, will help to ensure that it remains an accessible, flexible and efficient service option."

HCP President Phyllis A. Wang said: "It is vitally important that the State's Long Term Home Health Care Program (LTHHCP) remain a viable source of home and community-based care for New York's elderly and disabled. This legislation makes needed improvements to the LTHHCP to ensure that these services are available to those who wish to remain in the comfort of their own home. HCP thanks Senator Hannon for his continued support of home care and looks forward to working with the Governor and State Legislature to enact important enhancements to the LTHHCP."

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The LTHHCP, also known as the “Nursing Home Without Walls,” is a comprehensive statewide program that delivers a nursing-home level of care in a patient’s own home. The landmark program, which began thirty years ago, has served as a national model for long-term community-based care.

Program costs are capped at 75 percent of the rate of nursing home care, though the program has historically on average achieved a rate of 50 percent the cost of nursing home care. A physician’s order is required for patients to participate, incorporating a plan of care tailored to their individual needs. There are currently 108 LTHHCP providers in New York State authorized to serve approximately 30,000 patients.

This legislation comes at a critical time. A federal waiver allowing New York’s LTHHCP to deliver an expanded set of services must be renewed by December 31, 2008, meaning that the state will likely need to submit its renewal application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) by no later than September. If enacted prior to the close of the Legislative session at the end of June, the important enhancements contained in S.8092 could be included in the waiver renewal.

Among other provisions, the legislation would:

- Update, consolidate and increase the efficiency of the patient assessment and case management process.
- Expand eligibility and access – through cost-cap flexibility – for high-need patients whose enrollment in the program is deemed an appropriate and cost-effective alternative to institutional care and will be facilitated because of the program’s ability to generally provide care to patients at costs averaging well below the nursing home rate.
- Update and require Department of Health enforcement of patient notice/referral to the LTHHCP, better informing consumers about the option of long term home health care services and preventing premature admission to institutional care.
- Provide flexibility on the patient capacity limits of individual providers by authorizing a temporary increase of 25 percent or 25 patients, whichever is greater, during the period when a provider’s expansion application is pending state approval.
- Expand LTHHCP services to allow even further specialization in meeting patients’ needs – for example, patients with visual impairment, cognitive impairment (like persons with Alzheimer’s Disease), pediatric patients, and patients unable to access community based care because of a lack of housing options.
- Authorize LTHHCPs to incorporate hospice and palliative care services for their patients in conjunction with hospice providers, as is currently allowed for terminally ill patients in nursing homes.
- Require development of procedures for LTHHCPs and other waiver providers to collaborate in providing care to special needs populations such as individuals with mental health diagnoses, or the developmentally disabled.
- Allow individuals who elect to enroll in various forms of managed care plans to also maintain their enrollment in the LTHHCP.