

Assembly Informational Hearing on Family Care
Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care
Thursday, November 12, 2009

Comments submitted by: Janet L. Zander, Director
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Aging & Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin, President

Portage County has been operating a Resource Center since 1998 and has had the Family Care program available to eligible county residents since 2000. As a pilot for both the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and what was then referred to as the Care Management Organization (CMO) components of Family Care, Portage County was instrumental in demonstrating the success of Family Care; increasing access and choice, and providing quality services in a cost-effective manner to all eligible county residents.

1.) The Family Care program had a positive impact on the quantity, quality and variety of long term care resources available in our community. Pre-Family Care, individuals/families had few long term care options to choose from in Portage County, whether they were paying privately, using MA card services or on a Waiver program. Post Family Care, a large network of providers have responded to the demand for services and the continuum has vastly expanded. These providers are available to consumers regardless of funding sources. As my Information and Assistance Specialists meet with older adults and adults with disabilities and their families and caregivers to help them explore their long term care options, there are now truly options available to them. We no longer have a one size fits all model. This allows everyone the opportunity to choose the service that best meets their needs, both functionally and financially, at any given moment in time.

2.) That said, The ability of Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) to reach out to the community to make certain people are aware that this important options counseling service is available, is a key component of the Family Care program, and one of many services that makes ADRCs critical to Family Care's long term success. Therefore, ADRCs must be adequately funded using the revised cost model which reflects the actual costs associated with ADRC operations based upon an in-depth analysis completed by DHS. Resource Centers play a key role in providing complete, accurate, timely and unbiased information and advice to people who are looking for information about a variety of aging and disability resources, including people who will purchase services privately. Providing "information and assistance" and "options counseling" to individuals paying privately for services allows people to make informed decisions and prevents them from purchasing more than they really need because they do not have all of the available information that would help them purchase more frugally. Assisting people to better plan for themselves helps them to remain as independent as possible and to conserve their private resources, preventing or at least delaying their need to rely on public funding sources to pay for needed services. Further, Resource Centers that offer strong and effective prevention programs help to reduce the number of people who have disabling conditions. Outreach and early intervention programs conducted by ADRCs help them to reach people with mild disabilities to help individuals retain or improve functioning where possible and to delay or prevent the need to access comprehensive LTC services. Given the aging of the population and a growing number of people with disabilities, the cost of providing publicly funded long term care services remains a significant budgetary concern. Inadequate funding of ADRCs has triggered discussions of scaling back on the scope of what ADRCs are responsible for providing and what the core/essential services are. If ADRCs become only a place for eligibility screening and enrollment for low-income, individuals, any opportunities to conserve private resources and prevent or reduce the impact of chronic disabling conditions for those not already functional and financially eligible for Family Care will be lost.

3.) While Family Care continues to evolve and expansion continues around the state, we must remain vigilant to assure that the core values of Family Care are not compromised and that we continue the commitment to address new problems and issues as they arise. The issues can be complex, but locally when we remember that at the heart of everything is a "person" we are all trying to serve in the best way we know how, generally we can work things out. The reality for us in Portage County and central Wisconsin is, Family Care has given many more people service. Where before there were waiting lists or people had no choice about where services would be received or they simply went without, now they have Family Care. Portage County has reached the entitlement phase for Family Care; Wood and Marathon County are in the process of reducing their waiting lists. Family Care has provided "hope" for many who before had little to look forward to as they transitioned from youth services to the adult service world or the need for publicly funded long term care became a reality for an older or disabled adult and all that was available before was a long waiting list. For many areas, waiting lists have been eliminated, for some they are being reduced, and for others, they continue to wait for their turn. We must honor the commitment to expand Family Care statewide. We cannot continue to have areas where long waiting lists still exist and we cannot establish entitlement dates, only to extend them later when funds are not available. The primary goal of Wisconsin's redesign of the LTC system was to improve the quality of life of people who need supports. Family Care does this by providing more choices, more cost effectively, in order for more people to be served.

Thank you for this opportunity. While there is much I could say about the complexities and communication issues, etc. that have gotten increasingly more challenging as Family Care transitions from a small pilot project in a few counties to a statewide program, I do not want any of us to lose sight of the overall value of this program. We have maintained a good working relationship with our local managed care organization and this has allowed us to address most challenges and end up with a positive outcome for consumers.

Sincerely,

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