



OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGING

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Bob Taft, Governor
Joan W. Lawrence, Director

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Dear Residential Care Facility Administrator:

By now, you may have heard that the Ohio General Assembly, in passing a budget bill for the 2006-2007 biennium, has authorized the creation of a Medicaid-funded assisted living waiver. A number of you have already contacted us for more information about this exciting new program. The purpose of this letter is twofold: first, we want to share with you some general information about the new program; second, we are trying to estimate the number of residential care facilities that are interested in participating in the new assisted living waiver.

Any Medicaid waiver program requires approval from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Recognizing this fact, the legislation creating the assisted living program authorizes funding beginning **July 1, 2006**. During this year, our staff will work with key stakeholders, including representatives of residential care facilities, to develop criteria for the new assisted living waiver.

During the first year of implementation (SFY 2007), we are authorized to enroll up to 1800 eligible Ohioans. Who is eligible? Participants must be financially eligible for Medicaid and must be determined by our Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to need a "nursing facility level of care," the same as requirements for our PASSPORT program. Further, the budget bill limits participation to two groups: nursing facility residents desiring to relocate to assisted living and existing Medicaid waiver consumers (i.e., PASSPORT, Ohio Home Care, or Choices participants) who are disenrolling from the program and would otherwise permanently enter a nursing facility. Consumers, once determined eligible, can select from any eligible assisted living provider.

Which assisted living providers are eligible? The budget bill specifies that an eligible provider must be licensed as a residential care facility (and thus will need to meet all of the current RCF requirements). In addition, the provider must be willing to meet ODA's certification requirements. We envision that these will be minimal and will relate to participation in the assisted living waiver. One example: assisted living participants must be given a private room unless, of course, the participant chooses to share the room. But we are not implementing a separate inspection process; the Ohio Department of Health will assure that participating assisted living facilities meet the certification standards and will inform our staff that the facility is eligible.

As many of you know already, federal law permits states with an assisted living program to pay for the **services** rendered by the provider. Federal law does not permit states to use Medicaid funds to pay expenses associated with "room and board." Participating facilities will thus be receiving two payments – one for services (averaging \$1800 per month) from the state and one from the consumer for "room and board."

Here is how the enrollment process will work. Consumers will apply for the assisted living waiver through our regional Area Agencies on Aging. Each consumer must be approved for participation by the AAA. Once approved, the consumer and the consumer's family will benefit from the assignment of a care manager from the AAA who will facilitate the enrollment, assist the consumer in selecting a facility, and develop an initial service plan in consultation with the facility and the consumer. On an ongoing basis, the care manager's role is to assist both the facility and the consumer to ensure that the consumer's needs are being met.

Now to the second reason for our letter: We envision that the program will be available statewide from its inception. Therefore, we are trying to ascertain the level of interest in participating in the assisted living waiver program by Ohio's existing residential care facilities. **I am asking that you let us know by visiting our website (www.goldenbuckeye.com/alwaiver.html) and completing a simple form, by fax to 614-995-1049, or by simply dropping us a note if you are interested in potentially serving Medicaid-eligible assisted living consumers.** Your expression of interest is certainly not binding as the decision to participate or not participate in the program is entirely voluntary on the part of the facility. And you should be aware that simply because you are interested, you are not guaranteed that consumers will choose your facility (remember, that in an assisted living waiver, the right to placement follows the consumer). But it will help us in future planning to have some idea about the geographic distribution of interested facilities. A number of facilities have asked us whether there is either a minimum or maximum number of waiver participants that any one facility may serve. Because the consumer controls the placement, there is neither a minimum number nor a maximum number that the facility may serve.

In the months to come, more details about the assisted living program will become available, rules will be drafted, and the waiver application finalized. To ensure that you, as a potential provider, are kept "in the loop" on our plans, we have established a special link on our website, www.goldenbuckeye.com, that consumers and providers can use. We invite you to visit our site periodically and to use the site as an opportunity to send us your comments, suggestions or concerns.

I personally am very excited about the opportunity to develop Ohio's assisted living waiver program and, speaking for all of us here at ODA, we look forward to working with all of you in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Joan W. Lawrence
Director

JWL/rph