

Ohio Health Care Association

BULLETIN

Help Our Profession Ward Off Budget Cuts Enlist the Help of Special Families

Governor Taft is proposing a two-year rate freeze and other Medicaid cuts (dental care, chiropractic, podiatry, vision) that will have devastating effects on the long-term care profession and the residents we serve. The Ohio Health Care Association needs your help to stop this threat to quality care. Our Family Involvement Task Force is asking every member to participate in a program to educate and identify our residents, families, employees and volunteers who would be willing and able to contact legislators through letters, calls, e-mail and in person.

Rather than sending a blizzard of identically worded form letters to the Statehouse that have little effect, we propose a program that asks members to identify those “special” residents, families, employees and volunteers who can make a powerful impact on the issues of the day. All facilities could probably identify one or two special families who continually express their gratitude for the care you provide. Maybe these special families visit often and know how many dedicated people it takes to care for Mom and Dad. Maybe they have expressed to you how hard it was to care for their loved one at home and how institutional care is now their only *real* option. These are the residents, families and even your employees who aren’t timid and are willing to share their heartfelt opinions.

What OHCA is asking of you is to identify these special families and share with them your concerns about Governor Taft’s proposals. The administrator or another key individual who has a relationship with those family members should meet personally with them and discuss the Medicaid cuts. The discussion needs to be frank, personal, and specific to the facility. We have provided you with a simple fact sheet focusing on the impact of these budget proposals on residents and staff that you can give the family members to further educate them on the realities of these budget proposals. Then, if the family member seems supportive and concerned about the impact of the cuts, the facility representative should ask if they would be willing to write letters to legislators, make phone calls, send e-mails, etc., based on what they have learned about the cuts and the impact on the facility, residents, and staff. You can help them locate, by zip code, legislator contact information at www.legislature.state.oh.us/. If the family member has questions the facility representative can’t answer, please contact OHCA for answers you can then relay back to the family member.

We must urge our elected representatives to see what it is we do...take care of people (like their mother, brother, grandmother...) who truly cannot care for themselves. It is important that these legislators know the acuity of our residents, that these are people that need 24 hours of care each day...or as families of people with dementia say, 36 hours a day. This program is designed to allow our residents’ families to express their experience in trying to care for their loved ones at home, and to allow our residents to express their concerns.

Our goal is not to scare or alarm family members. But we do have an obligation to prepare our families for the realities of what could happen when a state, like Ohio, is faced with large budget deficits and less than promising revenues.

In short, we must put a face on what we do. We are not an “industry.” Our buildings will not suffer if there are deep reductions in funding. Grandmothers and grandfathers will suffer. People with severe disabilities will suffer. Employees and their families will suffer. We are a community of professionals working together to create and maintain a quality of life for all of these people.

We need your help. Your residents need your help. Together we can show Governor Taft and our elected representatives what rate freezes and budget cuts really mean to the lives of our long-term care residents. Please let us know, on the enclosed response form, how the families you meet with respond to this initiative. Should you have questions or comments, please contact Jamie Young (jyoung@ohca.org), 614/540-1323.

Medicaid Cuts Fact Sheet

- Governor Bob Taft's proposed two-year freeze on long-term care rates, including ICF-MR providers, is an affront to quality care for the elderly and disabled citizens of Ohio. Our efforts over the years to continually improve the care provided in nursing facilities are threatened by the Governor's budget plan. This is a huge step backwards for our residents.
- Governor Taft is also proposing to eliminate the following optional Medicaid services for adults (including seniors in long-term care facilities): dental, chiropractic, vision, psychology and podiatry.
- In most Ohio nursing facilities, the Medicaid program funds 70 percent of resident care. Governor Taft is proposing that Ohio should break the promise that has been made to our residents to care for them once their life savings have been depleted.
- Seventy-five percent of a facility's costs go toward hiring and maintaining a professional health care workforce. If cuts are to occur, it is very likely they will affect the level and amount of staff available in nursing facilities. As a result, many industry leaders expect staff layoffs in our nursing facilities.
- The proposed cuts will make it harder to recruit and hire qualified staff to care for those who truly cannot care for themselves. The long-term care profession in Ohio has undertaken a coordinated effort to attract new employees but this is jeopardized when state budget cuts are threatened.
- Governor Taft's "freeze" of Medicaid reimbursement represents a retroactive cut because payment rates are adjusted based on the previous year's costs. This will amount to more than \$10 per resident per day in the first year and more than \$19 per resident per day the second year.
- The Governor's proposed reduction is more than half a billion dollars in Medicaid funding to nursing facilities and ICF-MRs (state and federal support combined over the next two years). As an example, if those cuts were applied just to nurse aides, it would be the equivalent of the loss of over 8 nurse aides in the average home. Put another way, it would equal a reduction of about 4 RNs the first year and almost 8 the second year in the average home. But, setting aside dollars and big numbers, we cannot and should not, forget the impact these cuts will also have on our resident families.
- Cuts may also mean the resident living environment will not be as tidy or orderly, and necessary remodeling may not be done. It will also likely mean less non-clinical support staff and fewer resident events and activities. The Governor's cuts mean residents will go without some dental, vision, podiatry, psychological and other important services.
- Residents requiring extensive treatment and technologies such as dialysis will feel one of the most significant impacts, as they will likely no longer be admitted. The "frozen" Medicaid rate will not be adjusted to account for the facility's cost of providing care for these individuals. As a result, nursing facilities will be less likely to admit expensive customers, who will have to stay in hospitals longer.
- Some long-term care facilities may close, and their residents may have to move farther from family and friends. Again, the progress that has been made to improve the quality of care for our residents will suffer.
- The Governor says Ohio pays too much for nursing home care compared with other states. The state shouldn't turn its back on its commitment to quality care for Ohio seniors just because we are in tough budgetary times. Our residents need and deserve the high quality of care they have come to expect.
- Please call, write, e-mail or meet with your elected state representatives and senators and tell them how Governor Taft's proposals are bad news for your loved ones and to keep the commitment to long-term care.

Draft Facility Newsletter Article

Governor Taft Proposes Cut in Long-Term Care Medicaid Funding

By (administrator)

Ohio Governor Bob Taft has released his proposed budget for 2004-05, which contains a two-year rate freeze on all Medicaid caregivers, including all nursing facilities including *(name of facility)*. The Governor also proposed additional eligibility/coverage reductions for Medicaid recipients, and the elimination of optional Medicaid services for adults including dental, chiropractic, vision, psychology, and podiatry.

Medicaid is Ohio's health care program for the poor, elderly, and disabled. Medicaid is critically important to Ohio's elderly and chronically disabled citizens. The program is not just for the poor – it pays for close to 70 percent of all nursing home care and 100 percent of the care delivered in facilities for people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities (called ICFs/MR). Governor Taft's proposed state budget cuts would be devastating to this vulnerable population, as well as many others who depend on Medicaid.

Seventy-five percent of the cost of nursing home care is personnel-related. In this facility, ____ percent of residents rely on Medicaid, and payroll-related expenses account for ____ percent of every dollar paid for care.

With a freeze on rates, Medicaid will not cover the cost of remodeling to improve resident living environments, skyrocketing insurance premiums, and other necessary cost increases. In addition, many care providers will not receive payment for rising wages, benefits, and hours needed to attract sufficient staff to care for an increasingly needy population. The Governor's cuts also means that the Medicaid program will not pay for dental, chiropractic, vision, psychology, and podiatry services provided in nursing facilities.

The Governor's freeze amounts to a \$466 million reduction in care for Ohio nursing homes residents over the next two years. *(facility)* alone faces a loss of \$_____ in revenue because of these cuts. This will equal \$10 less per resident per day in the first year and \$19 less per resident per day the second year to provide the quality care our families expect for their loved ones. This comes on the heels of a federal cut in Medicare rates that amounts to more than \$260 million to Ohio's providers.

While the administration and staff of *(facility)* are committed to providing the best care and services possible for each of our residents, a cut such as this will prove a tremendous hardship to *(facility)* and its employees as we strive to maintain our standard of care. If you would like to discuss what you might do to help us fight this action by Governor Taft, please give me at call at *(phone number)*.

Edit this article as appropriate for your facility, and include it in your next family/community newsletter. If you would like a copy of this article in Microsoft Word format, please contact Stephen L. Mould at the Association offices: 614/436-4154, or by email at smould@ohca.org.

Ohio Health Care Association

Family Involvement Task Force
Response Form

Please answer the questions below about your meetings with family members or your residents regarding Governor Bob Taft's proposed Medicaid cuts. Return this form to Jamie Young at the Association office (fax: 614-436-0939).

1. Facility name/Staff name _____

2. Did you meet to discuss long-term care/Medicaid issues with any family members?
Yes _____ If yes, how many _____
No _____ If no, why not _____

3. Did the family member(s) have an understanding that a rate freeze will directly impact the number of facility staff and the quality of care provided to residents?
____ Yes ____ No

4. Briefly describe the response the family had to your conversation. Did they express a willingness to contact their legislators? _____

5. How would you rate the meeting? ____ Excellent ____ Good ____ Poor
Please explain: _____

6. Additional comments: _____

