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Home Care Tries To Outrun Wait List

STATEWIDE---Elder services agencies across the state are trying to outrun a rapidly approaching waiting list due to lack of funding.

“The office of Elder Affairs has notified us that a waiting list for the basic home care program will begin February 1st across the state,” explained Al Norman of Mass Home Care. “It will last at least until next July 1st---unless new funds are found this year.”

According to Norman, the state legislature will be working on a supplemental budget this week that could appropriate funding for home care—but only if lawmakers add the funds on Wednesday, when the budget is considered.

Norman said the home care wait list comes while the agencies already have been dealing with restricted services in a second home care program, known as the ECOP program: Enhanced Community Options Program.

Under the ECOP program, Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) are able to keep seniors who need a nursing facility level of care in the community by providing them with an “enhanced” level of daily in-home supports.

ECOP statewide currently has a waiting list of 885 elders. “Every day our Care Managers are working to try to keep these frail elders out of a nursing home without the resources to give them the enhanced service plans they not only need but are qualified to receive,” Norman said. “Every elder on the ECOP Wait List is eligible to be in a nursing home. We have to enroll them in the home care program instead, and their service plans are insufficient to meet their needs. If we have a wait list for home care and ECOP, we have no alternative but to put elders at risk of institutionalization.”

Norman told the following story of one 79 year old widow:

“She needs assistance with bathing, dressing and toileting as well as meal preparation, food shopping, laundry, medical transportation and household chores. She has Parkinson’s disease and is legally blind causing her to be at high risk for falls and in need of supervision 24 hours a day. This elder is Spanish speaking only and has limited informal supports who are expressing distress and burn out from their care giving responsibilities. As a result the elder is depressed and isolated. . She has been on the ECOP Wait List since November 30th, and is currently attending an Adult Day Health program 2 days per week. She also receives assistance with bathing and dressing—but only for 1 hour twice per week. We recommend this elder be in day care at least one

more day per week and receive personal care assistance every day to lessen the burden on the caregivers. Her service plan costs our agency \$800/month---which is \$534 a month over what the state reimburses us for her care. Therefore we are unable to increase her service plan at this time---despite the fact that she is qualified for and in need of the additional services.”

Norman says his 27 member agencies across the state are hoping the House of Representatives on Beacon Hill will pass a home care supplement of \$2.2 million statewide to help alleviate the elderly wait lists in the home care and ECOP programs.

“This could be our last chance to get help this year for these disabled seniors,” Norman said. “If not, the next five months are going to be very difficult for hundreds of seniors across the state.”

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