



LifeSpan calls upon State officials, candidates to adopt four key actions regarding senior care *Waiting lists, increased fees and program cuts harm seniors*

(Columbia, Md.) — October 23, 2006—LifeSpan President Isabella Firth today called upon State officials—and candidates running for public office —to focus their attention on Maryland’s rapidly growing and increasingly vulnerable senior population.

“We need for people to stand up and ask Maryland’s leaders how they will deal with an over-65 senior population that is underserved now and will double by the year 2030,” Firth insisted. She recommends political leaders adopt four key action items:

1. Expedite the process for determining Medicaid eligibility by updating the State’s antiquated computer system. Simplify paperwork and reduce penalties.
2. Improve quality of care by stabilizing funding for all senior care organizations. Budget cuts threaten quality of care—and providers need adequate compensation.
3. Create workforce incentives to encourage individuals to work in senior care. The lack of qualified staff will have a profound, negative effect on future senior care.
4. Reduce regulatory and administrative burdens placed on senior care providers. Creative solutions, not draconian regulations, will stimulate innovative care.

“We are facing a crisis with respect to seniors’ access to health and long term care,” said Firth. “State officials need to demonstrate leadership now to ensure that Maryland will care for its growing senior population. This can’t wait until the next election.”

Firth added Maryland’s senior care programs do not currently provide adequate services

or reimbursement as demonstrated by the number of programs operating with sizable waiting lists. The Older Adults Waiver program, for example, allows individuals who qualify for State or federal assistance to receive services in an assisted living facility rather than nursing homes, which tend to be more costly.

“Recently, an elderly resident with advanced Alzheimer’s residing in one of our member’s assisted living facilities applied for the waiver program after depleting her life savings. The State instructed her that more than 7,000 individuals were ahead of her on the waiting list,” Firth elaborated. “Ironically, the State is willing to pay up to \$5,000 per month to care for her in a nursing home rather than allow her to stay in her present home for half the cost. This scenario is bureaucracy at its worst. The resident—her family—and taxpayers are all poorly served in this situation.”

Firth said Maryland also needs to examine vulnerable seniors who may not qualify financially for Medicaid yet face daunting health concerns. These individuals often reside in nursing homes that do not receive reimbursement for their care but cannot legally turn them away.

“We hear a great deal about public policy that cuts programs and government waste but rarely mention the gap between what people need—as in the Older Adults Waiver program—and what is offered in response,” says Firth. “Our recommendations, if adopted, will create real programs that will dramatically improve people’s lives and save taxpayers millions of dollars at the same time.”

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