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Expand In-Home Care in Medicaid

August 3, 2012

The Intelligencer / Wheeling News-Register

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Few observant West Virginia legislators needed to hear the warning they received last month, that the percentage of senior citizens in our state is growing rapidly and will pose challenges to our society as well as our government.

But Center on Budget and Policy did more than focus on the demographics. It suggested action to anticipate change.

By about 2030, one of every four Mountain State residents will be 65 or older, according to a report by the center. By 2035, the number of West Virginians 85 and older will be nearly double what it is today.

Finding ways to cope with changes in the state economy - and to ensure older citizens receive services they will need such as health care - will be quite a challenge.

But some common-sense changes in how state government does things may help. For example, it has been suggested the state Medicaid program should devote more resources to community and home-based health care for low-income senior citizens. That would make many of them more comfortable than if they were shuffled off to nursing homes. It also could save the state money because at-home health care services often are less expensive than nursing homes.

State officials have seemed receptive to that idea during recent years. They should consider expanding Medicaid's community and home-based health care services even more, as one proactive approach to the problem of an aging populace.

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