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OUR TURN MARK FISHER, JOE GAUDIO AND PAUL BARNES



Even as Arizona's 65-and-older population has soared, our state spends significantly less per capita on Medicaid long-term care than the national median, according to Moody's Investors Services. ¶ This makes Arizona a national leader in long-term care. ¶ The Arizona Long Term Care System provides health coverage for individuals who are 65 or older, blind or disabled and need ongoing services at a nursing facility level of care.

We were delighted, though not surprised, by Moody's analysis, which rightly points out that Arizona's success in holding the line on health-care spending comes from effective policies, such as enabling folks to live independently in community-based settings rather than in more costly nursing homes.

Eighty-four percent of Arizonans who qualify for the state's long-term care system live at home or in a community-based setting, even though due to their illness or disability they are considered to have an "institutional level" of need.

The state's policies not only keep costs down, they also increase the quality of care and the quality of life



of members of the Arizona Long Term Care System.

What's the recipe for success? It's really quite simple: Arizona puts members first.

Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System requires the health plans of the state's Long Term Care to be fully integrated and responsible for the care of the whole person, ensuring that physical and behavioral health needs are met, community supports are identified and care is coordinated.

The voice of the member and their family is critical in this process. They set their own goals and decide how



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best to reach those goals. And the care team helps make it happen.

That might include arranging transportation so they can go for lunch at the neighborhood senior center, or finding help with errands and household chores.

While some people may think managed care is not the right approach for people with long-term care needs, we believe these are the people who benefit most.

AHCCCS health plans are a partner to the member and their family, providing the tools to help people direct their own care and develop a care plan and an approach that works for them and their family.

A sign of how well it is working is this extraordinary fact: There are 87 members 100 years and older in Arizona living in their own homes.

One 101-year-old woman even "failed hospice" once she returned home from a hospital stay to live with her daughter in

Phoenix. And her health continued to improve.

A voracious reader with a delightful sense of humor, she recovered from hip surgery last fall and, with family and community-based support, continues to crack jokes, write letters and stay connected with family members across the country.

The Arizona Long Term Care System is community-centered, leveraging the abilities of the private health plans to engage with their members and community-based partners to give people the choice to stay in their own home and be part of a community.

This cannot be done without community partnerships. And because each community is different, health plans can tailor programs differently to meet those needs. The reach of private health plans is far greater than that of any state agency.

The health plans use data to inform the member and the care team, enabling members and providers to make informed choices about the best treatment options.

And the plans are required to be qualified as special-needs plans, which

means Arizonans who qualify for both Medicaid and Medicare can have one single health plan, integrating and improving the quality of their care while reducing bureaucracy.

The Moody's analysis identified seven high-spending states — Alaska, Delaware, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Oregon — that will be the most challenged by Medicaid long-term care costs as the country's over-65 population continues to grow.

As you see, Arizona is not on the list, despite projections that the growth rate of this population here will be the highest in the nation, climbing 65 percent by 2024 compared with 34 percent nationally, according to Census Bureau estimates.

In fact, Arizona is among just three states that have kept growth in long-term care costs well below the national average even as their 65-plus population is booming.

Arizona is well-prepared to meet that challenge, but there is more we must do. To prepare for the future, we must:

» Work toward giving states more ability to coordinate with Medicare to encourage even greater alignment be-

tween Medicaid and Medicare

» Strengthen the home and community-based provider network. Arizona has standards for direct care workers, which is the right start, but value-based purchasing arrangements will better support these providers and allow them to share in the savings they generate.

» Explore new opportunities to expand community-based partnerships and leverage existing programs that support people in their homes

» Encourage families to plan ahead by purchasing long-term care insurance, providing the coverage people need and delaying the need for Medicaid.

We're proud that Arizona's long-term care program has been recognized as among the best in the country. And we fully expect many more of our members to live beyond their 100th birthday in the comfort of their homes, surrounded by the people they love, devouring books and cracking jokes.

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