

NEW YORK STATE

Nursing homes are in financial crisis

Our seniors deserve better: State must boost Medicaid rate to keep beds open, sites properly staffed

Janet Dauley Altwarg and Jack Pease
Guest Opinion

Nursing homes across New York state need your help. There are approximately 614 nursing homes in New York state. We say approximately because nursing homes have been closing at an increasing rate. If not closing, these facilities are forced to take vital beds offline, which means they are unavailable for people who need them.

If you, your loved ones or family members depend upon nursing home care in your community, this statistic should scare you.

The end of 2022 marked a new milestone that most people are unaware of — but should take notice. It marked 15 years since New York state raised the daily Medicaid rate paid to nursing homes to account for inflation. Except for a meager 1% increase this year, it had been 15 years since the last “trend factor” was provided in 2008.

Meanwhile, the inflationary costs that we all feel have risen by 42%. With Medicaid being the predominant payer for care (about 75% of all resident days are paid by Medicaid), is it any wonder nursing homes are on the verge of financial collapse?

Our seniors deserve better. The financial hardships faced by nursing homes directly impact nursing home residents who depend on us for custodial care (e.g., bathing, dressing, eating) and skilled care. This crisis has resulted in a reduction of nursing home beds and the inability of hospitals to discharge to nursing homes.

THE SHORTFALL

This alarm has been sounding for several years with legislators and governors — as failing to reimburse the actual cost of care is not sustainable. Today, the shortfall between what it costs to provide care for one day to one resident and what we are paid by New York state exceeds \$110. Action to increase Medicaid rates must be taken in 2023.

Unfortunately, New York has distinguished itself as being dead last, or at best second to last, in what it reimburses nursing homes compared to actual costs, according to studies comparing nursing home rates across states. It's one of very few states that does not update its rate regularly, even though the law requires periodic updates.

When most states increased Medicaid nursing home rates to respond to the pandemic, New York reduced the rate not once, but twice (cuts that were thankfully restored in the 2022 budget).

THE STAFFING CRISIS

Political will to prioritize care for our most vulnerable older adults is missing.

Adding insult to the financial injuries is the ongoing staffing crisis declared months ago impacting all sectors in the healthcare delivery system. While this is impacting services at all levels, nursing homes are unable to compete for the qual-



AP file photo/Nathan Howard

ity workforce we all aspire to employ.

The result is very real if you're in need of nursing home care. Due to staffing limitations, many nursing homes in Central New York are, for the first time in their history, leaving beds vacant. This includes members of the Long Term Care Executive Council of Central New York (LTCEC), which consists of members from six CNY counties: Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga, Madison, Cortland and Oneida, and represents a total of 4,665 skilled nursing beds.

Statewide, over 6,700 beds are offline for the same reason. This has a direct impact on hospital capacity — when hospitals cannot discharge patients who need nursing home services, there are no hospital beds for patients who truly need hospital care.

The people we serve deserve better from New York state. The outstanding employees who work in these settings deserve better. The family members who rely on us today and the community who will look to us in the future deserve better, too.

Nursing homes from across the state are asking every legislator and Gov. Kathy Hochul to take notice of the damage caused by financial neglect and prioritize long-term care in the next state budget by providing a 20 percent increase in the nursing home rate — still less than half the increase in costs we have absorbed over the past 15 years.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Janet Dauley Altwarg, director of Long Term Care Executive Council of Central New York (LTCEC of CNY), and Jack Pease, LTCEC chair and administrator at Loretto, write on behalf of these council members:

Bishop Rehabilitation & Nursing Center
Central Park Rehab & Nursing Center
The Cottages at Garden Grove
Elderwood at Liverpool
Iroquois Nursing Home
Jewish Health & Rehab Center
Loretto Health & Rehab Center
The Nottingham
Onondaga Center for Rehab
St. Camillus Residential Health Care
Sunnyside Care Center
Syracuse Home Association
Van Duyn Center for Rehab & Nursing
The Manor at Seneca Hill
Morningstar Care Center
Pontiac Care & Rehab Center
St. Luke Health Services
Auburn Rehab & Nursing Center
The Commons on St. Anthony
Finger Lakes Center for Living
Crouse Community Center
Cortland Park Rehab & Nursing Center
Crown Park Rehab & Nursing Center
Oneida Health Rehab & Extended Care
Rome Health
Sunset Nursing & Rehab
Waterville Residential Care Center

The financial hardships faced by nursing homes directly impact nursing home residents who depend on us for custodial care (e.g., bathing, dressing, eating) and skilled care.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Salvation Army: Thank you for helping us help others

To the Editor:

A new year has begun and with that, another successful holiday season at The Salvation Army of Syracuse is done. A season of toy drives, food drives and Red Kettles. A season made possible thanks to hundreds of volunteers, dozens of community partners and the overwhelming generosity of thousands of donors.

On Dec. 21, The Salvation Army's annual Christmas Bureau provided toys for about 8,000 children and 2,000 boxes of food filled with fresh produce and other essentials for a holiday meal.

Partner agencies joined forces to ensure that families in need were able to experience the joy of opening a gift and sharing a meal with loved ones on Christmas.

For weeks, dedicated bell-ringers helped spread Christmas cheer and collected donations at 27 Red Kettles throughout Onondaga County.

Companies, schools and sports teams collected food and toys.

Organizations and individuals sponsored entire programs, including our youth and adult shelters, to make sure those program recipients were not forgotten during a season that can be difficult for many.

We are so grateful to everyone in the Syracuse community for their commitment to helping those in need, and for

joining us year after year to provide a joyful, hopeful holiday season.

While the Christmas season is a highlight of the year, The Salvation Army staff are here to serve children, families, youth and adults every day of the year, all year long.

More than 35,000 people needed our help last year and we could not have done it without the generous support of this community.

On behalf of the staff, board and young leaders of The Salvation Army, Syracuse Area Services, thank you for helping us help others.

Linda Lopez Executive Director for Community Services

Major Charles Roberts Director of County Operations

The Salvation Army, Syracuse Area Services, Syracuse

Thank you, brother Lou Orr. Spread those long wings

To the Editor:

During my junior year as a student football athlete at Syracuse University in the early days of September 1976, there was a meeting place for some football and basketball players to get together between classes in a building called HBC (Huntington Beard Crouse) on the quad.

This is where I first met Louis Orr, a freshman on the Orangemen basketball team. I was living at Skytop, and Lou used to pop over.

We would jump in my new car and head to Nedrow, Fayetteville and other places in the community, listening to music and talking about life, family, etc. These were special times.

He always told me that I “took him under my wing,” even though he was a foot taller than me. His wings were longer.

Fast forward to the late spring of 1998, and the first induction ceremony of the Urban Sports Hall of Fame of Syracuse. We were deciding on a guest speaker.

I headed to Manley Fieldhouse and there was Lou, coaching Jason Hart, rebounding his jump shots.

We caught up with one another for a few minutes, and I asked him if he would be interested in being our guest speaker. He didn't even hesitate before saying yes, not even to pray over it. The Lou I knew prayed over everything.

This meant a lot, a tribute to a relationship that started 22 years before.

This was the kind of person he was — a loyal and true friend even after 22 years.

Thank you, brother Lou Orr; spread those long wings.

Carmen Harlow Urban Sports Hall of Fame of Syracuse Syracuse



Louis Orr plays defense for Syracuse University in 1982. The Post-Standard file photo