

White House Conference on Aging Solutions Forum
The Booming Dynamics of Aging - From Awareness to Action
July 13, 2005
Ramada Inn, Topeka, Kansas

Strengthening Medicare and Medicaid Reform are two of the top topics that need reinforcing according to Pamela Johnson-Betts, Secretary of the Kansas Department on Aging. Stating that Medicare needs to be affordable, accessible and provide comprehensive coverage for home care, prescription drugs and mental health services, Secretary Johnson-Betts led the comments provided at a Solutions Forum on July 13, 2005. Medicaid reform should end institutional bias and expand home and community based services for older persons and their caregivers. It should focus on the removal of barriers that inhibit consumer choice, controls the economy and affects independence. Secretary Johnson-Betts said this is a historical event and an exciting time to highlight and make senior issues visible. Kansas White House Conference on Aging delegates in attendance were Barbara Withee, Dr. Rosemary Chapin and Jessie Bryant.

Melvin Woods and Dr. Alejandro Aparicio, members of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee, joined a group of approximately 100 people in Topeka and across the state to learn first hand what issues are important to Kansas seniors. The Kansas Department on Aging hosted the event in Topeka and coordinated ten teleconference sites across the state. Mr. Woods provided an overview of the White House Conference priorities and indicated they were very focused on outcomes. He stated it is a time of unprecedented longevity for the 78 million baby boomers that will soon start turning 60. New seniors are more engaged, staying in the work force or returning to work. Seniors and future generations need to plan for their longevity and address long term care along the life span. Kansans must aim high and be bold.

The following is a list of the presenters and their topics. Each presenter was allowed five minutes to present their topic and solutions. They were required to provide written testimony corresponding to their verbal comments. The written testimony is attached.

Kathryn Hannemann, Director, Harvey County Department on Aging – Dental Care
Jessie Bryant, White House Conference on Aging Delegate – Prescription Drugs
Jean Taylor - Nursing Home Ombudsmen
Debra Harmon Zehr, Executive Vice President, Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (KAHSA)
Jack Shandy - Nursing Home Funding
Deanne Bacco - Nursing Home Care
Brenda Lax, President of the National Association of Foster Grandparents Program - volunteering/foster grandparents program
Pattie Johnston, Douglas County Library – Lifelong Learning
Reverend Wanda McDaniels – Grassroots involvement, need for services
Linda Berndt, President and Chief Executive Office Kansas Health Care Association – Long term care planning and workplace improvements
Barbara Withee, White House Conference on Aging Delegate – Health & well being
Denzal Davison – Fraudulent access to programs
Irv Hoffman, Silver Haired Legislature Chairman – Applying tobacco money to Medicaid
Jim Beckwith, Director, Northeast Kansas Area Agency on Aging – Service Delivery and Lifestyle changes

“The mouth is the window to the whole body” is a powerful quote from the Surgeon General. *Kathryn Hannemann*, Director of the Harvey County Department on Aging, said that poor access to dental care can have a profound impact on health and well-being and lead to reduced productivity and diminished physical and social function. Untreated dental problems cause pain, sleeplessness and depression. There is a need for more dentists and lower cost services to enrich the lives of senior Kansans. Ms. Hannemann told the story of “Mary” whom she met while working in a shelter. Mary was a younger senior whose husband had left her, leaving her poor and homeless. The shelter staff felt that Mary was employable but she had not been able to obtain a job, possibly due to her lack of teeth. Through the kindness of a donor, Mary was fitted with dentures and had a job within one week. She was soon able to live independently. Not all seniors have this kind of success story. Possible solutions include 1) more donated services from dentists through such programs as Mission of Mercy and We Smile Mobile Preventive Oral Health Clinics and Senior Care; 2) preventative dental hygiene services into local long term care facilities; 3) providing more reduced cost services to eligible seniors, and 4) expanding loan repayment program incentives for dental students to go to rural areas.

Retired geriatric nurse practitioner and White House Conference on Aging Kansas delegate, *Jessie Bryant*, addressed the high cost of prescription drugs. Since retiring she has been advising those who have difficulty paying for their prescription medications. One woman she knows received \$909 per month in Social Security in 2004 and spent \$934 on prescription drugs, Medicare premiums and insurance. Ms. Bryant offered the following possible solutions 1) Congress should pass a bill to reduce the patent on drugs to ten years instead of twenty and to plug the loop holes that allow extended time for exclusive rights; 2) Leave the education of health care providers about pharmaceuticals to universities and professional associations. It is a conflict of interest for drug companies to say they are educating professionals when they are really marketing drugs; 3) The FDA should no longer allow pharmaceutical companies to advertise prescription drugs on TV or in newspapers and magazines. This adds immensely to the cost of drugs. Leave the education of the public to the professionals. She closed with the statement that drug companies have more lobbyists in Congress than there are senators and representatives.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman program needs a volunteer program with two types of volunteers – one trained to investigate complaints and another to be the eyes and ears for those who investigate complaints. *Jean Taylor* said ideally there would be one volunteer in each nursing home across the state. There are already many family members in the facilities and they could report observations that may need further investigation. This solution would help the frail elderly in nursing homes receive quality care, make sure their rights are honored, and would be cost efficient.

Debra Harmon Zehr, Executive Vice President of Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (KAHSA), believes elders want community, quality, value and choice. Stakeholders should work together to create an array of integrated, high quality service options based on what the elders want and begin planning now for the baby boomers that will begin to reach age 80 years and older in 2026 and beyond. The solutions offered include 1) foster diversification and transformation of aging service providers; 2) conduct a rural aging service pilot project to assess the strengths and weaknesses of current aging services support system, project future needs, create a comprehensive and coordination community aging service action plan, and address the policy barriers to optimize implementation; 3) engage in technology demonstration projects; 4) develop transitions management demonstration projects.

Kansas Advocates for Better Care (KABC) Executive Director *Deanne Bacco* opened her comments by applauding the Kansas Department on Aging's efforts already under way to improve the quality of long term care for residents of licensed adult care homes. She went on to outline five areas that could lead to decreasing the number of non-compliance issues in nursing homes. These areas are 1) increase nursing staff hours per nursing home resident day; 2) Improve the reporting of findings and responses to consumers who file complaints to the abuse hotline; 3) Increase scrutiny of all poor performing nursing homes; 4) Elaborate on interpretative guidelines/policy about nursing home placement of persons with felony backgrounds; 5) Continue dialogues with the Kansas Attorney General, area agencies on aging and other local entities that have initiated multi-disciplinary teams to respond to, refer and resolve crimes allegedly committed in licensed adult care homes. Local law enforcement needs to become a more visible resource to investigate and resolve abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Jack Shandy, CPA, expressed concern about the growing gap between the cost of services and reimbursement rates. More and better health care is great, but how do we pay for it, he asked? Services in nursing homes have traditionally been subsidized through the private pay patients. Solutions offered included 1) Do fiscal impact statements for new nursing home requirements; 2) If the legislature freezes reimbursement rates, they must freeze service requirements; 3) the nursing home industry and the state need to work together to make care requirements mesh with cost and funds. He concluded with the comment that one cannot provide Cadillac services and be paid Hugo rates.

Linda Berndt, President and CEO of the Kansas Health Care Association shared ideas on two topic areas. She noted very few of our citizens think they can afford or need to purchase private insurance and most fail to make even rudimentary financial plans for their care as they age. To encourage planning along the lifespan and address the long term care funding needs, she offered the following ideas. 1) State provided LTC insurance options similar to Health Wave for those who cannot afford insurance on their own or need help with premiums; 2) Create cost sharing mechanisms that encourage citizens to pay at least part of the costs of services while exempting those most needy; 3) Require reverse mortgages before a person becomes Medicaid eligible; 4) Develop additional incentives for middle-class citizens to purchase long-term care insurance; 5) Create a statewide education and public-awareness campaign relating to Medicaid program scams by those who "impoverish" themselves to become eligible; 6) Reduce regulations, as she asserted-the impact of unnecessary regulations on costs is staggering.

Ms. Berndt also offered the following comments on improving the workplace of the future. 1) Improve soft-skills training. "It's not enough to empower staff, we must also eliminate unnecessary tasks and not continually do more with less"; 2) Implement technological changes that streamline paperwork and reduce errors; 3) Provide employer tax credits and/or deductions to those who provide medical and long term care insurance for workers who make below a given wage rate; 4) Encourage and allow more volunteerism in facilities. She concluded with, "Today's residents want a more 'home-like' environment, more amenities, more services. Tomorrow's residents will not tolerate institutional environments. They want choices and more choices."

Brenda Lax, President of the National Association of Foster Grandparents Program, presented a proposed resolution focusing on social engagement to preserve and enhance the older adult population's integral position in and connection to the community at large. The resolution included eight points to support it. Included in these points are reauthorization of the National and Community Service Trust Act, facilitate collaboration at all levels of organizations involving

older adult volunteers, combat ageism by encouraging the Federal Government to provide education and public awareness that emphasizes elders as givers of services rather than consumers of services, encourage training of volunteers and encourage research to identify and action to fill gaps between volunteer participation and productive potentials of people as they reach retirement age.

Reverend Wanda McDaniels asserted that there needs to be more involvement of grassroots senior citizens. She indicated often grassroots citizens are uncomfortable in such settings as they may speak differently, but nonetheless they have a message that should be heard. She stated forums should be held throughout Kansas where grassroots citizens are actively and honestly listened to. Grassroot citizens should be sought out and encouraged to attend. She suggested compensation should be given to disadvantaged seniors for their attendance and to allow some of these same grass root citizens to travel to Washington DC so their issues can be addressed. Reverend McDaniels touched on many issues including the need for better dental care, services for the homeless and addicts, grandparents raising their grandchildren, prescription drug costs, and transportation assistance.

Too often society discounts a person because of their age and has the perceived notion that this person no longer cares about the world around them. It is up to us to change the image of aging by giving opportunities for older adults to continue to learn new skills, new information and share the knowledge that has taken them a lifetime to acquire. There is no magic number when someone is “old.” *Pattie Johnston* of the Lawrence Public Library shared this perspective and noted that active minds must be encouraged along with maintenance of physical well being. Opportunities must be provided where older people are involved in lifelong learning. Libraries have taken the lead in making seniors a priority. By recognizing and adjusting to their special needs, such as lighting, steps, seating and special programming, libraries are acknowledging seniors as a major patron. She closed with the comment “Aging is not a disease. Why do we treat it as such?”

White House Conference on Aging Kansas delegate, *Barbara Withee* presented AARP national and state level initiatives. She noted members and non-members consistently identify health and well being as one of their top concerns inclusive of staying healthy for as long as possible, affordability of health care and the quality of health and long term care services. AARP Kansas believes that integrated solutions are needed to address the full range of problems in providing health and long term care, including supportive services. The solutions require a financially sound Medicare program, stable and affordable health care system, high quality health care products and community services that enable everyone, regardless of income, to get the care needed in a timely manner. There is a need to develop a system with home and community based services as the focus, available to all who need them and a communication network that can be accessed by the families who need services. AARP Kansas believes consolidated aging budget information is crucial for effective state planning to meet the needs of Kansas’ seniors.

Shame on us! *Denzal Davison* said shame on senior citizens. She stated she knows some senior citizens who are giving away their assets and finding ways to hide them so that they can become eligible for programs such as subsidized housing. There is fraudulent information provided by citizens and inadequate follow-up by housing specialists. Housing specialists should be able to verify true assets and income via tax returns going back three years. The look-back period should also be increased to five years instead of three.

“One of the major problems facing both the Federal and State governments is the soaring cost of Medicaid,” commented *Irv Hoffman*, Kansas Silver Haired Legislature Chairman. Many states (Kansas included) elected to forego a partial solution to this program when in November 1998 they signed an agreement with four major tobacco companies that would pay them approximately \$246 billion over 25 years. Some states have used these monies for golf course sprinkler systems, to discourage satanic worship, converting public television to digital or selling all or part of their future payments at a discount to investors. Medicaid claims were the centerpiece of the litigation the states initiated. It is indisputable that the payments by tobacco manufacturers are designed to reimburse states for Medicaid costs. The bottom line is that the federal government should put pressure on states to use the original tobacco settlement monies for the purposes stated in their lawsuit. They have the perfect argument; the Feds are cutting some Medicaid/Medicare monies and the argument is that the states could have or should have used the tobacco money to offset those additional or unfunded costs.

Jim Beckwith, Director of the Northeast Kansas Area Agency on Aging, said “It is time for an aging system that emphasizes wellness and prevention that encourages innovation, that stimulates change and that puts people first.” Ageism in America is as bad as it has ever been. It seems OK for comics and TV advertisements to make fun of “Geezers.” You rarely see an ad on TV that portrays growing older in a positive light. If you do, it is for *Depends*, *Poligrip* or *Viagra*. We owe the seniors of America more than just political rhetoric and platitudes, more than just a place on the shelf, more than just the budgetary leftovers from the legislative pork barrel politic. It is time for government to change. Society has changed dramatically while governmental systems have changed very little.

This concluded the scheduled comment period. There was time for a few comments from the audience at large. White House Conference on Aging Kansas delegate Dr. Rosemary Chapin noted that 15 percent of the Medicaid expenditures go to home and community based services while 85 percent is spent on nursing home care. She explained this needs to be balanced out. Several participants commented on nursing home issues such as more nursing hours per resident, attitude of care by nursing home staff, resident-centered care and education of nursing home staff. A participant also commented that insurance companies don’t want to insure anyone except those that don’t need it.

Closing the Solutions Forum, Joel Wright and Kathleen Harnish-Doucet summarized the comments received from the participants. A common thread between many of the speakers was the need to balance Medicare and Medicaid between long term care and home and community based services. There are many service gaps distressing today’s seniors and this will only be compounded by the onset of the baby boomers. Primary among those gaps was health and dental coverage. While increased government funding for programs and services was acknowledged as another theme that emerged was that people of all ages, from young children to older adults should also be encouraged to take responsibility, as their life circumstances will allow, for their own actions and plan for their future.