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Kentucky voices

Family caregivers need more support

BY RON BRIDGES

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Are you providing caregiving to a loved one?

You're not alone.

In Kentucky, nearly 735,000 people are caregivers to other adults, providing care valued at a staggering \$7.1 billion annually.

Many people incorrectly assume that nursing homes provide the majority of long-term care in this country. In fact, family members serve as the primary caretakers for people of all ages with disabilities, performing vital tasks like giving baths, helping others get dressed, dispensing medicine and providing transportation to doctors' appointments.

If you're not a caregiver now, maybe you were one in the past or will likely be one in the future.

Family caregivers in Kentucky make it possible for their loved ones to live independently. By helping with basic tasks of daily living, their mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters can stay at home where they want to be rather than move to a more costly nursing home.

I hear stories from family caregivers all the time. They work hard to provide care for their family members, all the while trying to balance their work and family demands.

They are unselfish in giving care and often need more training to deliver the best care for their loved one at home. Without proper support in the home, patients often are readmitted to hospitals.

Kentucky hospital readmission rates are already high. According to the report America's Health Rankings, released by United Health Foundation, 16 percent of Kentuckians aged 65 and older were readmitted to hospitals within 30 days of discharge.

Sixty-three Kentucky hospitals, about two-thirds of the state's total, were penalized by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for excessive hospital readmissions.

AARP Kentucky believes there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce hospital readmissions and help seniors age in their own homes.

We strongly support recommendations highlighted in the just-released Kentucky Legislative Research Commission Memorandum No. 517, "Supports for Family Caregivers of Elders."

LRC recommendations would allow patients to designate a caregiver at the time of their hospital admission and require hospitals to provide the caregiver with training on the patient's post-discharge care needs.

The LRC also suggests presumptive home-care eligibility as a policy reform. Presumptive eligibility would help older adults attain home-care services in a more timely fashion. Failure to determine timely eligibility for Medicaid home-based services often results in unnecessary nursing home placements.

This reform allows older adults to remain in a community setting, usually their own homes, and is the patient preferred and least costly alternative.

Presumptive eligibility has been successfully implemented in several states demonstrating reductions in institutional care while yielding better patient outcomes and low placement error rates (less than 2 percent in most states).

Informal unpaid caregiving is the backbone of our nation's long-term care system. These caregivers help prevent or delay the use of costly nursing home care, saving money for all of us taxpayers. Family caregivers in Kentucky support some of the most frail and vulnerable among us.

During the upcoming legislative session in Frankfort, we urge the General Assembly to act to give family caregivers the support they need to be successful.

Ron Bridges is state director of AARP Kentucky.

Read more here: http://www.kentucky.com/2015/01/04/3623228_family-caregivers-need-more-support.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy