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Low-income, older adults see reduced health care, housing services in Legislature’s 2026 Supplemental Budget

OLYMPIA – Advocates from skilled nursing and assisted living facilities at the Washington Health Care Association decried the Legislature’s 2026 Supplemental Budget, which claws back critical resources for those who rely on long-term care and our state’s broader health care safety net. Today’s announced budget:

- Delays rebase funding for assisted living that was allocated by the 2025 Legislature. This means that the Legislature will reverse its recent progress to uphold its statutory obligation to align Medicaid funding with the true costs of providing care. While assisted living care is provided in 2026, the state is funding it as if it is still 2022 and ignores historic, on-going inflation.
- As of the 2029 fiscal year, today’s announced budget will no longer fund low-wage equity, inflation adjustments or minimum-wage adjustments for skilled nursing facilities. Starting next fiscal year (2027), the low-wage equity funding will be reduced by 50 percent.
- While advocates continue to review implications for those who rely on skilled nursing facilities in this announced budget, it appears that the supplemental plan advanced by the Legislature improves upon the claw back of funding in Governor Ferguson’s initial proposal. However, today’s announced budget reduces funding for skilled nursing by \$20 million and implements caps on potential future Medicaid investments, despite historic cost inflations and a rapidly growing older population.

“Our state must either do the hard work to uphold our values of lowering barriers to health care access and a housing safety net, or accept that we are more practiced in platitudes than protecting the most vulnerable among us,” **said Carma Matti-Jackson, CEO of the Washington Health Care Association.** “This budget announced by Legislative leaders claws back Medicaid funding for assisted living allocated less than a year ago by this same body and pulls back the curtain on new Medicaid cuts in coming years. A sustainable health care system relies on a broad spectrum of care and when the legs are kicked out from one part of the spectrum, it risks dragging down the quality of care for us all as more people who would be best supported in assisted living or skilled nursing are instead trapped in hospitals, waiting in ERs and overloading our already strained emergency services. Washington is marching into a future where our population of adults older than 85 will quadruple from 2035-2050 and the population of adults 65 and older will double to 23% of all state residents by 2050 – that’s 2,283,600 million human beings. Are there any leaders among us in our state willing to do the hard work necessary to walk us back from the health care disaster we seem to be racing toward?”

Information on these two types of long-term care:

Facts on Assisted Living

Assisted Living provides 24/7 supervision that includes housekeeping, daily personal care, intermittent nursing, medication assistance, social activities, transportation support and meals. Those in Assisted Living often live in private apartments. Older adults in Assisted Living are:

- 30% are 74-84 years old, 55% are 85+
- 85% require medication assistance (avg. of 12-15 daily medications)
- 54% have Alzheimer's/dementia
- 72% identify as female
- 18.8% rely on Medicaid (access is low due to insufficient state investment in Medicaid)
 - o Private pay rates are increasing in order to subsidize low state Medicaid investments

Skilled Nursing Facilities

Skilled Nursing Facilities provide post-surgery therapies, transportation for on-going treatments (e.g. chemotherapy, dialysis), care for intense needs related to chronic medical treatment, diet

- (liquid, soft, tube), complex wound care, bowel/bladder programs, oxygen therapies and condition management (e.g. cancer, kidney failure, tracheotomy). Adults in Skilled Nursing Facilities are:
- 77 years old, on average
- 59% have moderate/high cognitive impairment, 42% diagnosed with Alzheimer's/dementia
- 32% are obese, 85% are bladder incontinent, 70% are bowel incontinent, 75% have hypertension and 28% have congestive heart failure
- 17% are bedfast
- 7,800 residents rely on Medicaid

About Washington Health Care Association

Washington Health Care Association is a nonprofit professional association for the long-term care community in Washington, representing 156 Skilled Nursing and 404 Assisted Living providers across the state. In partnership with these member facilities and business partners, WHCA promotes and advocates for healthy, affordable and ethical long-term care at the state and federal levels. For more information, please visit whca.org.

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