

Washington Association of Area Agencies on Aging

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2010

Support the Increasing Number of Unpaid Family Caregivers – Protect Family Caregiver Support Program Funding

GOAL

Continue support to the growing number of families and informal caregivers who provide care to loved ones with chronic conditions. When caregivers take care of themselves, they can continue to care for their family member or friend for a longer period of time. Often the decision to place a loved one in an institution is due to caregiver burnout and not changes in the health status of their loved one.

BACKGROUND

Unpaid family caregivers are the backbone of the long-term care system in Washington State, providing a substantial proportion of chronic care services to family and neighbors. Without their substantial support and involvement, long-term care costs, through Medicaid and other public spending, would be much greater.

Health conditions that result in chronic disability affect entire families, whether from the birth of a child with a developmental disability, a dad injured on the job, a brother with MS, or a mother who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Our families are our first responders and our best hope for sustained, quality, and loving care. But full-time caregiving is emotionally stressful and physically demanding, and caregivers suffer high rates of illness, depression and mortality. Families and other informal caregivers are struggling with the challenges of providing and sustaining help over time.

Small amounts of help and information have proven to be successful at sustaining family involvement and assisting caregivers to manage chronic conditions without more costly public support especially through the over-burdened Medicaid program.

NECESSARY ACTION: Continue the State's partnership with informal caregivers to decrease public spending. We are asking that the legislature continue the investment in unpaid family caregivers by the maintaining the existing level of state funding.