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3 years after law passes state provides long-term care options

Associated Press

EVANSVILLE. Ind. - The state is implementing a law passed three years ago that requires it to make home- and community-based long-term care for elderly and disabled Hoosiers as accessible as nursing-home care.

Options including assisted living, adult foster care and adult day services will become available and paid by Medicaid through the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, the agency announced Thursday at a news conference in Evansville.

“The impact will be huge,” said Michelle Niemier, executive director of United Senior Action of Indiana. “It’s the difference between being institutionalized and saying independent with dignity. An alliance of more than 70 long-term care groups had backed the 2003 legislation, and late Gov. Frank O’Bannon signed it into law. But FSSA did not implement it during his administration or that of his successor, former Gov. Joe Kernan, because of the high upfront costs.

Historically, Medicaid financial eligibility criteria favored traditional nursing home care over alternative services, said Steve Smith, director of FSSA Division of Aging. Now the state is creating uniform financial eligibility criteria for a broad range of long-term care services.

The new approach will permit care recipients, family and hospitals to choose the approach that works best for each person.

“In almost every area we serve, the enlightened care is a home-based or community based model and away from the institutional setting. And this is certainly true for many older Hoosier,” FSSA Secretary Match Roob said in a statement.

FSSA collaborated with lawmakers: consumer advocates and the long-term care industry to develop the program which it is calling Options.

Eventually, as care recipient demand alternatives other than nursing homes, providers will create use services, said John Cardwell, who led the alliance of groups that pushed for the law and now leads the Generations Project, which advocates on long-term care issues.

Issues still unresolved include how much the state will reimburse providers for services, what the mix of services will look like and how assisted living will work under the cram.

“The next two years will be a very dynamic period,” Cardwell said.

Art Logsdon, president of the Indiana Health Care Association. Said its member nursing homes are reinventing themselves, adding services to treat former patients once they have left institutionalized care.

“We've advocated for the right care at the right time in the right place,” Logsdon said.

One of the new options, congregate living, would allow care recipients to live in their own apartments with access to services they might need.

Indiana has more than 500 nursing homes, and they operate at 83 percent capacity, FSSA said. A new state fee has created funds to help them reduce their beds and convert to new services FSSA said.

State Sen. Vaneta Becker, R-Evansville, waited three years for Thursday's announcement after having sponsored the legislation while she was a member of the Indiana House of Representatives.

“It's an exciting time for Indiana,” she said.

Smith said the Options program will create capacity for the alternative services, improve access to them and raise public awareness about all long-term care options.