

Ensure All Seniors Have Access to Safe, Affordable Housing with Services

Safe, affordable housing is a critical foundation for New York’s growing older population to remain independent for as long as possible. In addition to age-appropriate design and accessibility features for older adults, senior housing offers the opportunity for socialization and engagement. Access to services and resources in the community is critical to allow residents of senior housing to age in place. Below are two key strategies that the State should take in this year’s budget to strengthen this foundation and save Medicaid dollars.

Establish and Fund the Affordable Independent Senior Housing Resident Assistance Program: LeadingAge New York urges the Legislature to invest \$10M over five years to support Resident Assistant positions in subsidized and income-restricted independent rental housing for low-income seniors. Older adults residing in affordable and income-restricted apartments are generally income-eligible for Medicaid, but often struggle to navigate the network of health and social supports that could help them age safely in place. Resident Assistants available on-site and at resident request can help address this need by providing information and referrals to supports in the community; education regarding Medicaid and other benefits; and assistance with accessing public benefits, services, and preventative programming.

A rigorous New York-based study of the [Selfhelp Active Services for Aging Model \(SHASAM\)](#) – a successful Resident Assistant program – found that the average Medicaid payment per person, per hospitalization was \$3,937 less for Selfhelp residents as compared to older adults living in the same Queens ZIP codes without services, and Selfhelp residents were 68 percent less likely to be hospitalized overall.^{1,2} Furthermore, with the SHASAM program in place, [less than 2 percent](#) of Selfhelp’s residents are transferred to a nursing home in any given year. However, without State operational support, most providers have little or no avenue outside of charitable donation to maintain a much-needed Resident Assistant staff person.

We anticipate that a \$10M investment in State funds over five years could support Resident Assistants in at least 16, 100-unit affordable senior housing buildings, which would serve 1,600 or more low-income older adults and generate a State-share Medicaid savings of at least \$6.5M per year, with net State-share Medicaid savings (after the \$2M investment) of at least \$4.5M annually. This is a low-cost initiative that the State can take in this year’s budget that will not only have significant return on investment, but will also improve quality of life for older adults and alleviate the pressure on higher levels of care that are more workforce-intensive.

Study Middle-Market Senior Housing Needs: As the percentage of older New Yorkers steadily increases, the State’s spending plans must evolve to address the housing-related needs of middle-income older adults. Within five years, the population of older adults who are too wealthy to qualify for most housing subsidy programs but not wealthy enough to afford market-rate rentals with appropriate aging services is projected to comprise 43 percent of the senior population.³ However, funds included in recent five-year spending plans for

¹ Gusmano, MK. Medicare Beneficiaries Living in Housing With Supportive Services Experienced Lower Hospital Use Than Others. *Health Affairs*. October 2018.

² Li, G., Vartanian, K., Weller, M., & Wright, B. Health in Housing: Exploring the Intersection between Housing and Health Care. Portland, OR: *Center for Outcomes, Research & Education*. 2016.

³ Pearson, Caroline F., Quinn, Charlene C., Loganathan, Sai, Rupa Datta, A., Burnham Mace, Beth, and Grabowski, David C. (2019). *The Forgotten Middle: Many Middle-Income Seniors Will Have Insufficient Resources for Housing and Health Care*. *Health Affairs* 38, No. 5: 851-859.

Homes and Community Renewal for middle-income rental development are generally committed to projects serving individuals and families, limiting the options available to and appropriate for middle-income seniors who are more likely to struggle with their mobility, health, and activities of daily living.⁴ This population is at risk of spending down to Medicaid levels and unnecessarily accessing a higher level of care due to lack of appropriate affordable housing options. LeadingAge New York recommends a State-directed study to evaluate the housing-related needs of low- and middle-income older adults, helping to ensure that future spending plans are balanced and effective for New York's aging population.

Given the growing population of older adults and the workforce challenges plaguing higher-level health and long-term care settings, the State must invest in modest and innovative programs that support healthy aging NOW – before our independent seniors need more advanced care.

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⁴ *Id.* at 857.