

**Senate Special Committee on Aging
Testimony by Loren Colman, Assistant Commissioner,
Continuing Care, Minnesota Department of Human Services
2 p.m., Wednesday, April 18, 2012**

Good afternoon.

I am Loren Colman, Assistant Commissioner for Continuing Care in the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Today I am representing Minnesota Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson.

Thank you on behalf of Commissioner Jesson for this opportunity to share with the Committee the efforts that Minnesota is making to provide the best possible long-term care system for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Minnesota has a strong infrastructure, built over many years, of long-term care services and supports for older adults and people with disabilities.

Last fall we were very proud and gratified to see the quality of Minnesota's long-term care system recognized by the AARP.

Minnesota ranked Number One among all states in the first-ever AARP Scorecard on Long-Term Services and Supports for Older Adults, People with Disabilities and Family Caregivers.

The report validates the direction that Minnesota has been moving for the past 25 years – to reduce reliance on institutional care and encourage access to services in home and community based settings.

It acknowledges Minnesota's efforts in providing comprehensive phone and web-based information and referral resources for seniors and their families and people with disabilities as well as providing evidence-based support to family caregivers.

Not that long ago, most people that were served by Medicaid in Minnesota received long-term care services in an institution. Over time, we've developed the supports needed to serve people in their own homes and communities.

Today, 63 percent of the older adults receiving Medicaid or Medical Assistance (MA) long-term care services get that care in their home or in community settings, and 95 percent of persons with disabilities receiving MA long-term care services are in community settings.

We are also proud of Minnesota's system of nursing homes as the state and facilities have worked in partnership toward improved quality and care.

- Several years ago we launched a Nursing Home Report Card to give consumers and family members access to comparative information on quality and consumer satisfaction.
- We have promoted innovation in care through performance incentive payments.
- The median length of stay in a Minnesota nursing home is now less than 30 days as services become more rehabilitative in nature.
- Successful collaborations with the industry have contributed to right-sizing the number and distribution of nursing facilities in the state.

In Minnesota, a healthy synergy results from having the policy areas for aging and adult services, disability services, nursing facility rates and policy and the Minnesota Board on Aging consolidated into the part of the Department of Human Services that I oversee.

We have worked very hard over the years to ensure a solid alignment of services delivered under Medicaid and the Older Americans Act. These services, on a continuum, become the critical safety net that seniors use as they become more frail.

By aligning them much more closely in how seniors transition among each service – we ensure that the system works in a more cost conscious manner and delivers care better to seniors and their caregivers.

The Older American Act is a critical resource in our long term care system and supports. The Senior LinkAge phone line, which annually serves 89,000 older Minnesotans and their families, and the complementary Disability Linkage Line and Minnesotahelp.info website, is a valuable foundation to our services.

These services comprise a statewide virtual call center that allows for a single toll-free access with routing to local communities.

Trained professionals answer questions about all types of insurance and Medicare products, including our state's long-term care partnership policies and other long-term care options. They are well positioned to answer inquiries from people seeking to understand the basics and options about housing and long term care services as they age.

Under new legislation, these counselors also are involved in expanded Long Term Care Consultation that helps individuals considering assisted living to become fully informed consumers. We have found that good information as early as possible can also delay the need for more expensive services or the need to access Medicaid.

Linkage Line Services have expanded under Lt. Governor Yvonne Prettner Solon to be a One Stop Shop for Seniors and their families for direct contact with state agencies on issues they may have with any area of state government.

Similar to many states, Minnesota is significantly challenged in meeting the anticipated demand for long term care services and supports, especially as the boomers age.

A project called Aging 2030 began 15 years ago to increase the understanding of all sectors in the state about the need to transform our infrastructures, policies and services to prepare for a permanent shift in the age of our state's population. The emphasis has been on strategies that increase economic security and family and community supports for older people.

We are currently working on a request for a Medicaid waiver that would redesign the program to offer benefits based on the need of the individual, so that they get the right levels of services based on their needs, from lower need to high need.

We know that the preference of most older Minnesotans is to remain in their home. We want to further empower older Minnesotans to make that choice by making home and community-based services the norm in Minnesota and institutional care the exception.

As Minnesota has worked successfully to rebalance our long-term care system, we also have had our eye on the coming age wave.

And now, we are on the cusp of launching the "Own Your Future" campaign in Minnesota to strongly encourage people, especially those 40 to 65 years old, to plan for their long-term care.

We are building on what other states did earlier in partnership with the federal government, and we are adding new elements:

- A public awareness campaign that includes marketing via the Web using contemporary messaging such as internet ads
- Development of more affordable products for middle-income people

- Better alignment of the incentives within Medicaid to support private financing of long-term care. The Long Term Care Partnership is a start but not the end.
- Targeted outreach to employers as a credible source of information about long-term care and financing options. Employers benefit from offering workers a sense of control and peace of mind that a long-term care plan can provide. The Minnesota business community has expressed a strong interest in working with us.

Our goal for “Own Your Future” is not only to raise awareness of the financial risk of not preparing for long-term care needs. We want to improve the quality of life for Minnesotans in their later years by increasing the number of those who have taken action to “own their future” and maintain choices.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify today.

I am happy to respond to questions.