

Comments related to the study of family caregiver supports and services

Human Services Interim Committee

Pembina County Public Health

November 3, 2015

Chairman Hogan, and members of the Human Services Interim Committee. My name is Jeanna Kujava. I am a registered nurse and the Public Health Director for the Pembina County Public Health Department.

Concerns surrounding a “lack of services for the elderly to remain in their home” was expressed loudly by residents living in Pembina County and was reflected within the community health needs assessment (CHNA) completed and released in 2014.

On behalf of the aging and elderly population who reside in Pembina County, the volunteer or hired caregivers and family members striving to provide quality independent living safely in Pembina County, I ask for your sustained commitment to improving the system of care giving in North Dakota.

The system of care giving in North Dakota demands strong support for coordination of care efforts and policy development. In the next few minutes I will explain why.

The phenomenon of aging catches people by surprise and thus unprepared. Providing care for an individual or family member requires a special set of skills. Each person brings a unique living situation, network of support or lack thereof, health related necessities, chronic health conditions and state of wellbeing. From the aging individual to the adult children and caregiver the increasing needs of an individual often snowballs into increased stress, strained relationships and care giver fatigue.

Through the support of workplace policies an environment that grants caregivers and adult children permission to care for their aging loved one while balancing employment in the workforce would be created.

An environment supportive of family caregivers would allow aging residents and caregivers to continue to live safely on the family farm in rural settings rather than forced to relocate to larger regional centers away from their farmland, life long friends, faith community and social networks.

Many aging men and women that I have met have expressed feeling isolated, undernourished physically and emotionally, forgotten or over looked by their busy family members.

Many aging men and women that I have met are not capable of communicating how they are functioning at home and are in denial about their increasing need for assistance.

To remain living independently at home in a rural environment requires services and resources different and often more robust from those living within a city.

Some individuals require more support in areas such as housework, meal planning and buying groceries. Others express the need for community involvement and volunteer opportunities while others need assistance in medication management and reminders to follow up with clinic appointments.



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Many aging men and women that I have listened to are not equipped with the tools for aging successfully in their own home. They lack awareness of available resources, are limited to hand written and verbal communication, and are required to navigate through a complex, fragmented health and human services system in order to meet their essential needs. While at the same time their body is showing signs of decline, mobility may be impaired and the consequences of their lifestyle choices emerge by the presence of progressing chronic disease.

The ability to remain living independently and safely at home demands focused attention, an attentive listening ear, compassion and time. Attributes that are not easily found in today's world.

Care coordination encompasses many of these attributes and takes into consideration every aspect of an individual's well-being. Effective care coordination through the many transitions in and out of the health and human service system has the potential to provide quality independent living for aging individuals while also supporting family caregivers.

Many of the elderly men and women that I have listened to have worked tirelessly their entire lives, overcome challenges and struggles, and have spent time serving our country. These aging men and women deserve quality independent living with exceptional care coordination as they near the end of their lives. There should be no substitutes.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to provide comment, thank you for your service and remind you that the aging citizens of Pembina County and North Dakota deserve your focused attention, attentive listening ear, compassion and time in the creation of ...

Policy initiatives that allow for adult children to care for their aging parent without having to leave the workforce.. System changes within the healthcare and health and human service systems that promote coordination and focus upon successful transitions home. Finally, your support of an environment with resources that allow for creativity in order to meet the demands for successful care giving. Thank you.

Respectfully,

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