

Governor Spitzer Proposes Budget Increases That Will Support Older New Yorkers

In a year of severe fiscal restraint, Governor Spitzer has proposed an increase of over \$11 million to the budget of the NYS Office for the Aging (NYSOFA.) These increases are directed at expanding services to older New Yorkers. The anticipated increases, if approved by the Legislature, will build upon the Governor's commitment to enable older New Yorkers to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. The budget also provides some flexibility for NYSOFA to demonstrate innovations that support caregivers and empower communities to support aging in place.

Several new initiatives have been included in the proposed budget. These have been developed as a result of NYSOFA Director Burgess's listening tour and round tables throughout the state during the first year of the Governors' administration. Older New Yorkers, service providers, social work professionals, NYSOFA advisory committees and county offices for the aging have shared their ideas for addressing the needs of an aging population. Those concepts ranged from caregiver supports to empowering communities to develop programs for aging in place.

Funding has been proposed for the following new initiatives in the NYSFOA budget:

- **Targeted EISEP** (Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program) – New funding of \$2,500,000 is proposed to provide new services to those that are most at-risk of becoming institutionalized and/or Medicaid eligible when conventional EISEP services are not sufficient to provide the help needed to remain at home. The program, run through competitively selected local offices for the aging, will be evaluated over a three year demonstration period.

- **Regional Caregiver Centers for Excellence** – New funding of \$950,000 is proposed to support caregiver services. The funds will be used for two purposes, adding \$200,000 in much needed respite care as well dedicating \$750,000 to create regional

Centers for Excellence or "hubs" to serve multi-county areas. These hubs will be expected to develop innovations to help caregivers care for their loved ones. The hubs will also provide training and technical assistance to existing programs.

- **Enriched Social Adult Day Services Demonstration Program** – New funding of \$1,000,000 is proposed to provide adult day services to serve those whose needs exceed the level of assistance currently available through social adult day care but are not appropriate candidates for a medical model, the adult day health care program. An enriched social adult day services project would be established as a demonstration project to test this model's ability to maintain elderly persons in the community by deterring or delaying institutionalization. The program, run through competitively selected service providers, will be evaluated over a three year demonstration program.

(continued on page 3)

Family Caregiver Council Creates Public Policy Recommendations

The Family Caregiver Council, created by Governor Spitzer as part of the 2007 Executive Budget, met three times in 2007 and plans are underway for a meeting in March. The Council's goals are to provide a strong statement of support for family caregivers; undertake a comprehensive mapping and evaluation of existing services and family caregiver needs; review key policies and practices; establish a mechanism to coordinate these activities and to propose new and expanded services and policy implementation; and focus on strengthening local agencies to reach, assess, and support caregivers. As part of the Council's work, NYSOFA dedicated the November issue of this monthly newsletter to recognize and support family caregivers. Next steps to support caregivers include the dissemination of

(continued on page 4)

Director's Corner

Director Michael J. Burgess



Aging is all about decline and loss, so it is said. For many it is a struggle, no doubt, but we need to remind ourselves that many are disproving that statement by spending their later years in rewarding ways. There are so many who are living into their 90s and beyond now and who go on proving that life can be worthwhile. We



can't diminish the reality that we have many older persons in our state who struggle with their health and bills and pills. They depend on family, friends, community and yes, government to help them now that they aren't as independent as they once were.

Much of what our office does and the county offices for the aging do is to provide home delivered meals, help people get heating aid, prescription drugs and other benefits. We take great pride in the success of the aging network and the medical community in increasing life spans, reducing the poverty rate among older persons, establishing senior centers and improving quality of life.

Now, we still have serious problems to confront with the huge age wave of Baby Boomers like me who will retire in the years ahead and the subsequent demands on our health care system and the loss of skilled workers in fields like nursing and social work. We need not deny the aging of the population nor fear it. I believe, and have pursued in my job, the idea that just as individuals need to be empowered to exercise their rights, communities need to be empowered to participate in all levels of government to design the kinds of environments they want to live in.

The Governor has proposed new demonstration projects that help communities design ways to allow persons to remain in the community through self-help and cooperative models. We will do more to support caregivers who are providing 80% of the long-term care in our state at a value of \$24 billion. We need to do much more to educate older persons and caregivers about prevention, like how to avoid falls, which usually end up requiring long term care.

I realize more than ever, though, that a big part of my job is to encourage society, government, business, and media to not view older persons just as a dependent population, but one that is giving and caring and resourceful. This is not something unknown

to us - how often do we see a grandparent at the bus stop when the gradeschooler comes home because mom and dad are working?

Given the numbers we face, we have no choice but to involve older persons as resources themselves - as volunteers in health care, hospice, senior companions, or counselors regarding benefits. I have no doubt that the people of New York are up to the challenge of an aging society. We have to accept this challenge and its problems but also embrace the opportunities to use the talents and wisdom of older persons as resources.

NY Connects begins to impact our local communities

NY Connects: Choices for Long Term Care, the statewide initiative that provides access to information and assistance to those seeking long term care choices, is making a steady impact in various counties throughout the state.

Through the provision of information and assistance to individuals 60 and over, along with individuals of all ages with disabilities, their respective caregivers and health care professionals, NY Connects is making it easier for people to determine which services will best meet their growing needs. Consumers and providers from around the state have been commending the local counties' NY Connects staff for identifying long term care options that they did not know existed within their communities. The following are examples of how NY Connects is affecting the lives of individuals around the state;

Jefferson County received a call from a woman seeking services for her widowed mother, who lives alone in an extremely rural section. The NY Connects specialist was able to identify services in that area, such as the Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP), Personal Emergency Response System (PERS) and Home Delivered Meals, all of which she was eligible to receive. The

(continued on page 4)

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Eliot Spitzer
Governor

Michael J. Burgess
Director

Budget Proposal...

(from page 1)

• **Community Empowerment Initiative** – New funding of \$400,000 is proposed to foster grassroots efforts to develop supportive neighborhoods allowing aging in place initiatives to thrive.

Additional funds in the NYSOFA budget have also been planned by the Governor for several existing services:

Workforce - Recognizing the difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, the Governor is supporting a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for workers in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance), CSE (Community Services for the Elderly) and the EISEP programs. He has also made a commitment to support COLA funding for three years into the future.

Nutrition – An additional \$4 million has been proposed for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

The Governor has proposed funding most of the remaining programs in the NYSOFA budget at the same level as the previous year. Significantly, the NY Connects: Choices for Long Term Care program, offering local level information and assistance will receive continue to receive funding under the Governor’s proposed budget. Additionally, the new Family Caregiver’s Council will receive a second year of funding under the Governor’s proposal. As has been the tradition in the state, the Governor did not include items in his various budget bills that were added by the Legislature during their deliberations last year. Several programs that were in the adopted budget for NYSOFA in 2007-8 fell into that category in the proposed Executive Budget, including legislative initiatives.

Many programs proposed by the Governor under the jurisdiction of other state agencies will have a positive impact on older New Yorkers. While our analysis of the entire state budget is still ongoing to detail all of these initiatives, it is clear that the Governor will focus efforts on improving the economy, including the transportation and housing infrastructure. The Governor plans a 40% increase in the enhanced STAR property tax relief program for older New Yorkers and is working on efforts to establish a property tax cap. He has also proposed increased funding for the state’s parks, mental health services and law enforcement.

Health Care restructuring proposals will result in improved access to community-based services. The Governor has proposed changing funding methods for the health care delivery system to make payments that are calculated on modern trends rather than the current structure that is two decades old. In doing so, he has stressed the need to provide financial incentives for services that support prevention of

disease and the delivery of community-based care. His efforts to increase private physician and clinic reimbursement by Medicaid will result in extended office hours and development of practices in underserved areas.

Workforce recruitment and retention – the Governor has proposed new efforts to recruit physicians to underserved communities, including assistance in repayment of medical school loans. Additionally, he plans to expand nursing school enrollments through increased support to educate nursing faculty at SUNY and CUNY programs. Hospitals and other institutional health care settings would have a reliable funding stream for recruitment and retention under the Governor’s proposal and many human service delivery site in addition to the aging programs noted above will benefit from cost of living adjustments for their workers.

Health Insurance – the Governor has continued his pledge to move towards universal health coverage through several new initiatives. The state will fund an expansion of the children’s health insurance program to ensure that every child can have coverage, despite the denial of expansion funds from the federal government. Additionally, a new initiative was proposed to allow all New Yorkers, regardless of age, to benefit from a new discount prescription drug card if their income is the same as the thresholds that apply to the over 65 population currently in the Elderly Prescription Insurance Coverage program.

The Legislature will convene hearings on the proposed Executive Budget in the coming weeks. NYSOFA is expected to testify before the joint legislative fiscal committees on February 5. Negotiations on the state budget will follow the hearings, with the new fiscal year scheduled to start April 1.

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NY Connects impacts...

(from page 2)

daughter expressed her gratitude after admitting that she didn't know where to turn to for help, particularly since she does not live in Jefferson County. The woman also expressed relief in knowing that her mother will be safe in her own home.

Essex County received feedback from a caregiver who was seeking services for her elderly mother. The caregiver extended her appreciation to the Essex NY Connects staff for finding resources that helped her mother get needed repairs to her mobile home and linking her to the Meals on Wheels program. These long term care services helped her remain in her community, while bringing peace of mind to her loved ones.

The Rockland County NY Connects Coordinator was invited to speak at a workshop on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) at the Helen Hayes Hospital. The coordinator assumed that she would be primarily addressing health professionals, but was pleasantly surprised to see many TBI consumers. She informed the audience about the NY Connects program and the many resources available to people with disabilities in Rockland County. The staff at Helen Hayes Hospital was so impressed with the presentation that they sent the coordinator a formal "thank-you" card and invited her back as a guest speaker.

Lewis County communicated that as a result of their NY Connects, Long Term Care Council, the county's health and human services agencies have forged partnerships that historically were not established. As a result, there has been increased collaboration between professionals across the long term care continuum. They reported that at their next Long Term Care Council meeting there will be an opportunity for cross-training its members, when a guest speaker will present on resources for the TBI community in Lewis County.

The number of counties providing information and assistance through the NY Connects initiative is increasing. As these numbers increase, more New Yorkers will be able to take advantage of the wealth of information and resources available to those seeking long term care choices. For more information about NY Connects in your county, please visit www.nyconnects.org



NYSOFA Director Mike Burgess (far left) participated in the Westchester Legislative Speak-Out on Senior Issues on January 25 with (from left), County Legislator Bernice Spreckman, Chair of the Committee on Generational, Cultural and Ethnic Diversity; Mae Carpenter, Commissioner, Dept. of Senior Programs & Services; State Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (Bronx), Chair of the Assembly Committee on Aging; and Dan Sambol, member of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Aging. (photo by Rose Vinci)

Family Caregiver Council...

(from page 1)

important resource information that caregivers will find helpful during encounters with the health care delivery system. The information will be useful for individuals and agencies.

The Council, with the support of NYSOFA and other state agencies serving as ex-officio members, has formulated preliminary policy recommendations based on the premise that services incorporate cultural, linguistic, age-related, and disability competencies; address caregivers caring for people across the lifespan and across all disability areas and recognize their valuable role in supporting their loved ones; and focus on the reality of people's lives, recognizing the holistic nature of the caregiver and care receiver. These themes are intended to be inclusive of all relationships that provide voluntary caregiving, including partner, friend and faith community member and those already included in legal definitions of family.

The Council's recommendations were grouped into five categories: expanding community support services for caregivers; increasing information and outreach; ensuring housing options and supports; upholding the rights of caregivers; and developing a state and local infrastructure. Council Chair Cynthia Fountain and Vice Chair Brigette Castellano conveyed the preliminary recommendations to Governor Spitzer, thanking him for "the opportunity to provide guidance that will enable the state to develop policies and programs that promote caregiving in the most appropriate environment by reducing barriers and enhancing support for the individuals who provide care for friends, family or community members of all ages and all levels of ability." For more information on budget initiatives that support caregiving, please see story on pages 1 and 3.

Calendar of Events

February 5 – Albany - NYS Legislative Budget Hearing Aging and Human Services Issues

February 7 – NYC - NYS Assembly Hearing on Abuse and Exploitation of Vulnerable Elderly Citizens

March 6 – Albany
NYS Family Caregiver Council