

HHS Assesses State Of Assisted Living

Three New Studies Characterize Facilities, Residents

In January, the assistant secretary for planning and evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released three studies related to assisted living.

The first report, “Using Medicaid to Cover Services for Elderly Persons in Residential Care Settings: State Policy Maker and Stakeholder Views in Six States,” found that respondents favored using Medicaid funds for assisted living care and, nearly unanimously, wanted to keep regulation of assisted living at the state level.

“Trends in Residential Long Term Care: Use of Nursing Homes and Assisted Living and Characteristics of Facilities and Residents” found that the proportion of the elderly receiving long term care in residential settings other than nursing facilities increased during the 1990s and that during the same period assisted living facilities changed to accommodate residents with greater needs and grew in average size. ASPE published a third report, “Estimates of the Risk of Long Term Care: Assisted Living and Nursing Home Facilities,” focused on trying to determine what factors are independently associated with the need to move from a community dwelling to a residential care setting.

According to the Medicaid survey results, respondents believed the use of Medicaid funding for residential care settings afforded consumers additional long term care options and saved the state money.

Respondents thought regulatory changes were necessary to address residents’ increased acuity levels. Nearly everyone interviewed believed that licensing and regulation of assisted living existed best as a state, not a federal, function.

The trends study showed that the proportion of the elderly receiving long term care in residential settings other than nursing facilities increased during the 1990s. Assisted living facilities became larger and, by 1998, nearly three-quarters of the residents lived in facilities with at least 50 beds.

The study also showed that women dominated both settings, comprising about three-fourths of the population. The study noted a rise in the number of married people in assisted living, from 11 percent in 1992 to 17 percent in 1998. The study also found that assisted living residents were becoming less healthy and exhibited more disabilities over the study period.

Slightly more than half of assisted living residents needed help with three or more activities of daily living in 1998—up from about one-third in 1992.

Study findings also showed cognitive impairment and mental disorders were the most common conditions in both settings.

—Amy Waye