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Needs of the elderly must be addressed

Nursing homes will play a bigger role in our communities as the baby boomer generation ages and independent living becomes more difficult.

Unfortunately for Texas nursing homes, the rate of reimbursement by Medicaid is not keeping up with the rising costs of the care they provide.

At only \$113 a day, the Lone Star State has the second lowest reimbursement rate in the nation.

The nursing home industry as well as state health and human services officials are recommending increasing nursing home spending by \$368 million over the next biennium.

There is support in Austin for the proposal, but the real test of that backing will come when lawmakers, faced with a more than a \$9 billion state budget shortfall, have to make tough decisions on which programs to fund and which to trim.

The additional funding sought for nursing home care would provide an additional \$20 per day per Medicaid-funded patient. Even a \$133-a-day reimbursement would not completely cover the costs. Private pay nursing home patients are paying \$135 to \$140 a day for their care.

Nursing home residents are checking in at an older age and coming in with more serious health problems than they used to, nursing home industry officials say.

The extra funding will help some nursing home bolster their nursing staffs, which would help reduce hospital stays and emergency room visits by nursing home patients.

It makes economic sense to provide an increase in the nursing home reimbursement rate now instead of paying a much higher price later through higher hospital costs.

The statisticians have been warning of the growing aging population for years. Their needs must be addressed before the situation becomes a crisis.

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