Health Care Costs Associated with Aging Are Increasing

- The per capita cost of providing health care for a person age 65 or older is three to five times greater than the cost for someone younger than 65.
- The population of Americans age 65 and older is expected to double in the next 25 years due to increased life expectancy and the aging of baby boomers.
- The anticipated growth in the aging population is expected to result in a 25 percent increase in health care costs. As baby boomers turn 65, the financing of their care will shift from the private sector to publicly financed programs.

What Factors Are Responsible for Higher Health Care Costs Associated with Aging?

- Chronic diseases are the primary driver of health costs for the elderly.
  - At least 80 percent of older Americans are living with at least one chronic condition and 50 percent have at least two.
  - More than two-thirds of current health care costs involve treating chronic illnesses among older Americans.
  - Chronic diseases are responsible for seven of every 10 deaths in the U.S., resulting in more than 1.7 million deaths each year.
- Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths for seniors.
  - Each year, approximately 300,000 Americans over 64 break their hips, and three-fourths of them are women.
  - Among older people who break a hip, 29 percent die within a year. The combination of a fracture with chronic disease leads to death in 75 percent of cases.

The Aging Population Is Becoming More Diverse

- Currently, 16.4 percent of the older population is comprised of racial and ethnic minorities. That figure is expected to increase to more than 25 percent by 2030.
- Chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer affect certain racial and ethnic groups disproportionately.

Older Americans Want to “Age in Place”

- “Aging in place” means growing older without having to move from the places older people consider their natural homes.
- Approximately 27 percent of senior citizens live in a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC). A NORC is a community or neighborhood where residents remain for years and age as neighbors.
- A smaller percentage of elderly people live in nursing homes today than in 1990. Instead, more elderly people depend on assisted-living residences or receive care in their homes.
Health Care Costs Associated with Aging Can Be Reduced

- Public health programs that help senior citizens maintain independence can help control increasing health care costs.
- Chronic disease self-management programs that provide education, coping strategies, problem-solving techniques and decision-making tools have proved to be effective at reducing health care costs.
- Senior citizens who do not have children to care for them are less likely to live in nursing homes if they live in a state that spends more on home- and community-based services.
- Fall prevention efforts targeting frail adults can reduce the risk of falling and related injuries by 25 percent.
- Exercises such as tai chi and strength building have proved to be effective in increasing muscular strength and balance in older adults, which in turn decreases chances of fall-related injuries.

What Can State Legislators Do?

- Increase the use of preventive services.
  - Establish incentives for third-party payer coverage of preventive services.
  - Establish statewide chronic disease self-management programs.
  - Get more elders vaccinated for flu and pneumonia.
  - Support aging programs to encourage older adults to use the full range of preventive services.
  - Support funding to increase training for health and allied professionals on prevention-focused geriatric care.
  - Encourage collaboration between the state public health department and other state agencies that deal with aging issues so that older adults use proven health promotion programs.
- Promote healthy aging.
  - Promote the message that older adults can benefit from adopting healthy lifestyles, regardless of their age.
  - Conduct targeted communications campaigns with healthy aging messages.
  - Record a public service announcement showcasing healthy behaviors.
- Support measures that address the needs of older adults who desire to age in place.
  - Support funding for community-based programs involving collaboration of health and social service agencies for the elderly.
  - Provide incentives to local planning boards and other agencies to encourage housing design features that help achieve “livable communities” by:
    - Increasing availability of alternative modes of transportation;
    - Increasing opportunities for physical activity;
    - Developing walkable communities; and
    - Promoting pedestrian safety and safe driving among older adults.

For more detail, see the Legislator Policy Brief on “Keeping the Aging Population Healthy” by visiting www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications

If you would like to receive more information, references, or to explore this topic in greater depth, please:
- Send your inquiry to http://www.healthystates.csg.org/ (keyword: questions/comments), or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244-8000.

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