

Watkins: Government change should produce progress

By Tom Watkins | Posted: Saturday, December 3, 2011 9:08 am

Change is coming, ready or not.

There certainly has been lots of what high school kids refer to as “drama” at local, state and national levels of late. It is our responsibility as a democracy to pay attention to “drama” and discover what our government is doing to and for us.

Slipping under the public radar is one such area of dramatic change: Long-term care for the elderly, people with developmental disabilities, and other long-term health or mental health needs.

Due to national policy changes and fiscal pressures brought about by the nation’s debt crisis, the economic downturn combined with the aging of U.S citizens (people age 60 and over, soon to be the largest group in America) demand will increase for long-term care, and services to our most vulnerable citizens.

At the state level, even with tough fiscal times, Michigan’s former Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Gov. Rick Snyder have worked diligently to support the service programs for Michigan’s most vulnerable citizens. For this we are grateful.

Yet, we need to remain mindful that more changes are necessary and will occur as the governor attempts to balance Michigan’s budget deficits and develop sustainable long-term care programs for Michigan’s seniors and people with disabilities.

Currently, Michigan’s system of care is under review and there is apprehension and fear about the changes to come.

Altering or compromising Michigan’s carefully constructed system of specialty support services for persons in need of long-term care must be approached very cautiously.

It is going to be a battle as lawmakers seek a balance between fiscal integrity and human decency. Those who have made it their life’s work to help seniors and those with disabilities, have demonstrated that given flexibility in the uses of federal and state resources, they can maintain high quality services and a fiscally sensible policy.

A good example of this flexibility are programs that keep people living in their homes and communities to support people by letting them have more control over services and the resources. These approaches, “person-centered planning” or “patient directed care” aid in ‘self-determination’.

“Person-centered planning” or “patient centered care” is a model of supporting the individual at the head (not the tail) of the planning process. The systems supporting them must be flexible, and tailored to the individual and their allies to help provide options those in need desire and need.

For more information on self determination see:http://www.arcmi.org/person-centered_planning.htm or <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/>

To see how far Michigan has come in creating a system where people with disabilities can live authentic lives in their community read: “New Life.” <http://domemagazine.com/tomwatkins/tw081611> to see the powerful comments from advocates, consumers of services, parents and professionals. See how Michigan has been a leader in this field.

The Michigan Department of Community Health is in the process of reviewing this system of care. Under the leadership of both Snyder and director, Olga Dazzo, the department staff with assistance of Public Sector Consultants are to be commended for an open process seeking input from those directly impacted by the changes.

To see what your state government is up in these critical areas and to add your voice go to: <https://janus.pscinc.com/dualeligibles>

Change is inevitable. It is our responsibility as citizens to assure that with change come progress.

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