

February 7, 2023

Public Comment for House Bill 2 – Health & Human Services

Long-Term Care Provider Rates

- “Montana is a relatively aged state: tied for sixth highest percentage of population over age 65 with 18%. Long-term care facilities are closing because the provider rates are too low. We need to increase provider rates, provide coverage for in-home care, and support the providers.”

-Charlene Iannucci

- “Montana is a relatively aged state: tied for sixth highest percentage of population over age 65 with 18%. Long-term care facilities are closing because the provider rates are too low. We need to increase provider rates, provide coverage for in-home care, and support the providers.

Please protect payment of Medicaid funds to provider so that they are paid what the services cost.”

-Ellen Childress

- “I support the concept, but it does not go far enough to fund Long-term Care Providers at the rate recommended by the Guidehouse Study. We need to make Montana compensation for providers and workers competitive. Montana has already lost 11 Nursing Homes. We can't afford to lose any more! Please vote NO on this bill as written.”

-Donna Martin

- “As someone who has cared for elderly parents and an elderly uncle, I am supporting this long-term care funding piece because we are in a crisis of senior care: nursing homes are closing, people aging in their homes cannot find workers, and workers avoid these low-paying often challenging jobs. We also need to keep these seniors in their communities, without sending them far afield. Competitive wages are desperately needed to address these problems. Please help by keeping this long-term care funding provision in HB 2. Thank you.”

-Lynn Stanley

- “Our Montana nursing homes are in an acute crisis, with 11 having closed this year. This has an especially harmful impact on rural communities. Provider rates need to be at the level the Guidehouse Study recommended to maintain existing facilities and meet our increasingly elderly resident's needs. However, the entire care system needs additional support so that in-home assistance is available, workers are adequately paid and families can afford care. Now is the time to do it. Funding is available if properly allocated.”

-Gordon Whirry

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- “Fund the Medicaid provider rate at the cost of business in the guidehouse study.
<https://dphhs.mt.gov/assets/ProviderRateStudy/Reports/FinalMTNursingFacilityRateStudyReport.pdf>

In order for Montana to address the states long-term / senior care crisis, we need to fund provider rates at the level the Guidehouse Study recommended: we will continue to face staffing shortages if our long-term health care providers are not paid a competitive wage.

We need to support Montana providers who've been in this work for decades. We need to properly fund and support Montana workers. If we do not, Montana families will continue to struggle to find local, affordable long-term care.

11 nursing homes and counting have closed already. That means Montanans parents and grandparents are shuttled further and further away from family as their community nursing homes close down. Rural communities rely on these facilities for both care and employment / local economy.”

-Don Gardner

- “It is increasingly difficult to find affordable long-term healthcare for our elders. Eleven nursing homes have closed already, which means parents and grandparents are shuttled further and further away from family as their community nursing homes close down. Rural communities rely on these facilities for both care and employment, and thereby contribute to the local economies. Staffing shortages will be a crippling problem if long-term health care providers are not paid a competitive wage. In order for Montana to address the states long-term / senior care crisis, we need to fund provider rates at the level the Guidehouse Study recommends. Thank you.”

-Lorene Bishop

- “Please move forward on HB 2. Vote yes. As a state, we need to meet the needs of seniors and those needing health care who reside in long term care facilities. The Service Delivery Recommendations and other recommendations of the Guidehouse Study should be considered and carefully implemented for MT as needed. Please support HB 2. Thank you for your consideration and service.”

-Mary Warthen

- “Here in Red Lodge, we lost the only affordable care home in town last year. I've known many people who were able to visit their parents or spouses on a daily basis because there was a place in town that made it possible. Many people also lost their jobs due to this situation. The question is: Do we care for our elderly population or not?

It is a crime that our older citizens are being forced to move too far away from their loved ones when we can clearly afford care homes in rural areas. It's heartbreaking.

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[Provide a personal story; family members struggling to find senior care / friends whose parents have been moved as homes shut down / etc]

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-Kathryn Kern

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-Terri Nelson

HEART Fund

- “This HEART initiative bill is misguided:

This would use some of the revenue from Marijuana sales to fund behavioral health, including substance abuse treatment. We need to make investments in child and adult behavioral health, mental health, substance abuse because the state is facing a crisis. Dedicated workers should not have to sacrifice their health and that of their families caring for MTs most vulnerable people. Vulnerable people need to be cared for in their homes, and communities, by friends and neighbors close to their loved ones. They should not have to leave their communities and homes to get the care they need.”

-Kathryn Kern

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- “We need to make investments in child and adult behavioral health, mental health, substance abuse because the state is facing a crisis.”

-Terri Nelson

- “Please support the HEART Initiative. It is one good way to use the revenue from marijuana sales. We need to take better care of the vulnerable.”

-Karen Sheets

- “Please support the HEART initiative. Funding for mental health and substance abuse could be provided via the marijuana tax income. Funds could raise salaries for workers to hire, train and keep good health care workers. It's a good initiative. Please keep supporting it.”

-Mary Warthen

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-Bonita Reishus

Medicaid Funding

- “My name is Sam Schmidt. I am a provider, a small business owner, and represent APTA-MT (American Physical Therapy Association of Montana). There are over 2,000 PTs in the state of MT.

Thank you for your service and leading our state in policies that will help all Montanans live better and access care better.

The Allied Professions, (PT, OT and Speech Therapies per Medicaid language) serve the Medicaid population in hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living centers, home health, and outpatient ortho and neuro clinics across Montana.

It is proven in the current research that PT reduces total healthcare costs significantly IF THERE IS ACCESS to Physical Therapy. Research shows 89% lower Opioids use, 28% less imaging, and 15% less ER visits when PT was used - all which reduces total cost of care for the Medicaid system and the taxpayers supporting MT Medicaid.

We are facing a turning point where many clinics are either capping or no longer accepting Medicaid patients due to the poor reimbursement. Small businesses like mine need to have more reimbursement for our services so we can pay our providers to afford the steep increases in housing, childcare and student loan costs. Medicaid patients need to have access to PT so to keep overall healthcare costs down.

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60% of businesses have employees on Medicaid - Physical Therapy keeps the workforce functional and at work - through active, conservative, cost saving interventions. PTs also have high RVUs (relative value units) for all of our codes, this is how the Medicaid system identifies the importance and frequency of medical services. RVUs also are scored on level of required education and training which PTs have a doctoral level education and are direct providers in Montana.

The Physical Therapy was not extensively included in this past rate provider study and we are at the lowest reimbursement among providers who have equally high Relative Value Units. Physical Therapists have the highest student debt to income ratio among medical professionals.

Ultimately, Physical Therapy saves the healthcare system dollars and reduces unnecessary disability by providing treatments through movement, education, and function.

Thank you for your service and allowing me to represent the PTs of Montana as well as all those Montanans who are on Medicaid that we have the opportunity to serve and provide care to.”

-Samantha Schmidt