

White House Conference Policy Committee Listening Session Comments

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Good morning, I am Jennifer Dexter, Senior Government Relations Specialist with Easter Seals. I have had the opportunity to work with many of you in the past and I look forward to working with you all. I want to start by thanking you for the opportunity to come here today and provide Easter Seals' perspective on the important issues facing the older adults that we serve. We look forward to next years White House conference and hope to provide some unique perspectives.

Easter Seals is the nation's largest provider of adult day services. We have over 60 adult day centers located in close to 25 states. We are very proud of the support we provide through this service that helps thousands of Americans and their families to remain independently living in the community for as long as possible. Our centers are very diverse, from our center in Miami that serves Spanish speaking seniors, to our center in New Hampshire that has a specific program for seniors dealing with depression, to our center in Great Falls, Montana that serves primarily younger adults with developmental disabilities.

Our adult day programs are just one of the five primary services provided by our network of over 90 affiliates. Our other services also touch the lives of older adults. The first is medical rehabilitation, including Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy, that can help an older adult stay and become healthy and more independent. Second is job training and employment, including administration of one of the Department of Labor's SCSEP grants authorized by Title V of the Older American Act. Under that grant, we help train and support seniors with poor work prospects and connect them with opportunities at nonprofit organizations that will help them achieve full employment. Thirdly is our child development centers which provide integrated child care for children with and without disabilities. These programs are often collocated with our adult day service centers. We are beginning to see a good deal of intergenerational programming happening at these centers that greatly benefits attendees at both programs. Finally, we offer camping and recreation services which provides programs for people with disabilities of all ages to get the health and psychological benefits that come with participation in the community.

There are several policy issues that Easter Seals has identified as priorities that I would like to share with you today and that I hope will be integrated into the discussions that will go into planning the White House Conference.

The first is very basic. We want to make sure that adult day services is identified as an integral part of the long term care continuum. People, particularly the general public but also professionals serving seniors, so often believe that assisted living or nursing home care are the only options for someone who can no longer live totally independently. You

would be amazed at the people who can benefit from adult day services, from people with very advanced Alzheimer's disease, to people with very significant physical and mental disabilities. We need your help to raise awareness about adult day services and its benefits. This is an area where the White House Conference could have a significant impact by including adult day services in the agenda.

Another issue that Easter Seals is concerned about is how disability and aging service providers can work together. This is needed for several reasons. First, there is a great deal that both systems can learn from each other. For too long, these two communities have competed for scarce resources and there has not been collaboration in the areas of best practices, research and other issues. For instance, there is a great deal of information about assistive technology that could benefit many older adults and that knowledge exists in the disability community. This collaboration will also become increasingly important as people with disabilities live longer and begin to require more traditional aging services. We want to help to make sure that aging service providers have the knowledge and programs to serve this population. There is also a growing population of older parents of adults with developmental disabilities who are concerned about how they can continue to care for their middle-aged children and what will happen to their children when they are no longer able to care for them. The issues that present with aging may be the first time that many of these caregivers seek assistance with caregiving and may turn to the aging network for help. It is important that there are resources available to help them. I encourage you to include disability service providers at some level in the discussions around the conference and include issues facing people aging with disability.

Finally, and I am sure that this is an issue that will be raised often in these listening session, is the need to support caregivers in the workforce. As people live longer, healthier lives and work longer there will be an increasing number of spousal caregivers on top of the millions of caregivers who will be working and caring for the baby boomers as they age. Easter Seals is seeking to identify best practices in integrating adult day service into the workplace. The same way there has been a revolution in employer supported child care, there needs to be increased attention to employer supported eldercare. One concept we have been exploring is how the federal government might model this through supporting adult day services for federal employees. We have a strong relationship with the General Services Administration around child care and would like to help leverage that relationship to explore this concept. We hope that the momentum of the conference would help us do this.

I look forward to working with all of you over the next year and during the conference to raise these important issues. Thank you again for this opportunity.