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### **Cuts to Medicaid Funded Home Care Could Have Devastating Affect on North Carolina's Most Vulnerable**

June 10, 2009 – Raleigh, NC - Faced with one of the largest budget shortfalls, the North Carolina legislature is threatening to cut funding for a program that provides desperately-needed care services for some of the most vulnerable and poorest citizens in the state. The North Carolina Senate recently passed a budget which included a \$55 million cut to the Medicaid Personal Care Services (PCS) program, which provides home care services to over 36,000 people in North Carolina, including the frail, the elderly, and children with profound physical and developmental disabilities. In addition, the PCS program supports the economy by offering gainful employment for 20,000 home health aides throughout the state. Members of the House of Representatives, who are currently working on their budget, have proposed a \$49 million cut to the PCS program. What's more, state cuts to the PCS program will also result in the loss of federally matched dollars, bringing the total amount of funds lost to \$160 million.

Bayada Nurses, a home health agency with offices throughout the state, has joined with the North Carolina Association for Home and Hospice Care (AHHO) and its 900 member agencies in a grass roots effort to educate legislators and the community about the devastating impact of these proposed cuts to the PCS program.

“The average cost to care for each individual in the PCS program is \$750 per month,” said Shannon McCarson, a division director with Bayada Nurses. “Compare that figure to the cost of facility-based care, which can total as much as \$1,700 to \$3,000 per month. It is much more cost-effective to care for these people in their own homes, where they can maintain their independence and dignity.”

Indeed, the interventions of home health aides reduce costs by improving the quality of life for those in the PCS program. “Aides help with what we call activities of daily living, or ADLs,” explained McCarson. “This includes helping with bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting, medication reminders and helping them to get around, or ambulate. Without this help, many of the people in the program would be forced to enter facility-based care, or to manage on their own.”

According to McCarson, without intervention from the PCS program, the frail and elderly could experience an increase in falls or accidentally take the wrong medication. In addition, without help with feeding and meal preparation, they are at risk for nutritional deficiencies or dehydration, or a worsening of chronic conditions like diabetes. This could result in a significant increase in hospital emergency room visits, putting further strain on the state's healthcare resources.

Dare Isaacs, an 85 year old resident of Zionsville who suffered a stroke three years ago, knows without the help from her home health aides, she would, indeed, have to enter a nursing home, a prospect that she wants to avoid. Isaacs relies on home health aides provided through PCS to care for her while her son is at work.

"The girls that come are so good to me, they help me do things I can't do on my own like making breakfast or getting into the shower," said Isaacs. "Even though I have a hard time getting around, because of them, I get to stay at home."

Melissa Wykle, a home health aide with Bayada Nurses who cares for Dare two days a week, sees first-hand how care in the home helps people like Dare. "I love my job, it's wonderful," said Wykle. "Elderly people like Dare do so much better in their own home when they are around everything that is familiar instead of being around strange walls and faces."

Margaret Fry, of Monroe, does not know how she would cope without the PCS program. Her 13-year old daughter, Meghann, was diagnosed with profound autism at the age of three. The little girl's name sat on a waiting list for five years until she finally began to receive PCS services. Now, the family benefits from the care provided by certified nursing assistant Melissa Thomas, who comes to the home five days a week, for two hours each day.

"I describe my daughter as being like a tall two-year old," said Fry. "She can not talk, she is not potty trained, she can not brush her hair or her teeth or dress herself. Plus she has violet seizures that can cause her to bite or severely scratch her arms," said Fry, who also has a 4-year old son. "I am on alert constantly with Meghann, 24/7, making sure she doesn't wander off, or put something in her mouth that could cause her to choke, or making sure she doesn't injure herself during a seizure. Even though it's just a couple of hours a day, when Melissa is here, I get a bit of a break so that I can spend some time with my son."

Melissa Thomas loves being able to help Meghann, it gives her a sense of accomplishment. "She trusts me," said Thomas, who changes Meghann's diaper, and helps her with grooming and dressing. "I can't image what would happen if I was no longer able to be here for Meghann's family because of budget cuts. They need this service so much."

According to Tracy Colvard, director of government relations and public policy for AHHC, the state has proposed a number of cuts in health and human services because the decision was made to appropriate federal stimulus money into other areas of the budget. "We implore our legislators to raise revenue from other sources and restore money back into health and human services so that these massive cuts can be prevented," he said.

In addition to cuts to the PCS program, the legislature has also proposed a four percent rate reduction for all Medicaid service providers and a proposal to freeze new patient slots for the CAP-DA (Community Alternative Program for Disabled Adults) and CAP-MR/DD (Community

Alternative Program for the Mentally Retarded/Developmentally Delayed) programs, which provide personal care in the home.

“By freezing slots in the CAP-DA and CAP-MR/DD programs, those patients that need more extensive assistance would be placed on long waiting lists while being forced to try to make it on their own or with the limited assistance of family members,” explained Colvard. “The four percent rate reduction to Medicaid providers means that the staff that provides the day to day care may be forced to take a pay cut or the companies providing the Medicaid services may no longer be able to afford to do so.”

According to McCarson, Bayada Nurses provides care to 219 people through the PCS program. In addition, the agency is able to care for 518 people through the CAP-DA program, and to 166 people through the CAP-MR/DD program. These state-funded programs allow Bayada Nurses to employ over 1,300 home health aides per week to care for these clients.

According to Colvard, critics of the PCS program claim that 45 percent of those receiving benefits do not qualify. However, to ensure that people in PCS meet the eligibility requirements, their physician must authorize an initial assessment and then must authorize a plan of care. “Physician authorization helps ensure that only those people who are frail and disabled and in true need of these services are the ones who are going to get these services,” said McCarson. “In addition, all services are provided under the supervision of a registered nurse.”

Bayada Nurses, along with AHHC, is strongly urging community members to contact their local legislators in Raleigh to protest the deep cuts to this program. To find out contact information for state legislators or for more information on the proposed cuts to the PCS program, contact Shannon McCarson, division director, Bayada Nurses at 336-855-5220.

*“Founded in 1975 by J. Mark Baiada, Bayada Nurses is an independently-owned home health agency that employs more than 12,000 nurses, home health aides, therapists and social workers in more than 140 offices and 18 states, as well as the UK. Bayada Nurses provides skilled, rehabilitative, therapeutic, personal care, and support services to people of all ages in the comfort of their own homes. For more information, visit [www.bayada.com](http://www.bayada.com).*