

# Community Colleges and Caregiver Training: Implications for Policymakers

*By James P. Nyberg*

## Introduction

Recent years have seen an increasing number of federal and state initiatives intended to encourage older people to remain in the community longer by promoting home and community-based services. This is in response to consumer demands, legal precedents (e.g. the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision), and fiscal pressures to reduce costly nursing home care and increase home and community-based options. Indeed, Medicaid, which is the primary payer of long-term care, is increasingly focused on programs that help individuals to remain in the community for as long as possible. One common element of these initiatives is a reliance on in-home caregivers – both paid caregivers and family caregivers. Their roles and responsibilities are steadily increasing, yet their education and training requirements are often limited. Going forward, it is clear that successful home and community-based initiatives will require quality caregiving, and policymakers (and care recipients) have a vested interest in ensuring that those providing such care receive the appropriate education and training.

The Caregiver Training Initiative (CTI), with long-term support from MetLife Foundation, is an integral component of the ILC's Caregiving Project for Older Americans and was created to support a wide range of training programs at community colleges. Now in its third year, the CTI has supported thirty-six training programs geared toward in-home caregivers and family caregivers. The community colleges have proven to be well-positioned to develop and implement quality caregiver training programs, and can play a key role in supporting policy objectives to create a balanced long-term care system. This Issue Brief will provide an overview of the trend toward in-home services, highlight the importance of well-trained caregivers to the success of in-home care, and discuss the unique role community colleges can play in supporting such initiatives, drawing on the experiences of the CTI.

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## Increasing Trend Toward Home and Community-Based Care

Virtually every state is expanding efforts to promote home and community-based care as a cost-effective option to nursing home care, as well as to better meet consumer demand and to comply with the Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision, which requires that states provide the least restrictive setting for disabled individuals. Moreover, given that Medicaid accounts for over forty percent of long-term care spending, states have financial incentives to reduce costly nursing home use and promote home and community-based care. These efforts often fall under the term "rebalancing long-term care" and include a wide range of initiatives, including various Medicaid waiver programs intended to provide the flexibility for individuals who need a nursing home level of care to remain in the community and receive the necessary services. One specific initiative is known as "Cash and Counseling," which is a Medicaid program in which individuals establish monthly budgets which they use to manage and pay for their care needs, often through friends and family. A related initiative is dubbed "Money Follows the Person," which the federal government launched to help states in their efforts to move individuals out of nursing homes by helping finance the transition to community-based long-term care services. In addition, many states are developing adult foster care programs, which place elders into households in the community and provide individuals in the house with a stipend to care for the elders.

Clearly, these programs provide consumers with greater choice and flexibility in the care and services they receive. But as they proliferate and older individuals remain in the community longer and become increasingly frail, policymakers need to ensure the individuals responsible for providing the in-home care be adequately trained. In addition, the conditions in which caregivers work are very different than institutional settings. They are more independent, must make decisions and judgments often without supervision or consultation, and provide care in a wide range of environments. This also highlights the importance of education and training for in-home caregivers.

## Caregiver Training Needs to be Improved to Support Long-Term Care Rebalancing

The effort to rebalance long-term care systems and help people remain in the community longer relies on the existence of well-trained caregivers, both professional and family, to ensure quality and cost-effective care. Yet, as the ILC and other entities such as the Institute of Medicine (IOM) have extensively documented,<sup>1,2</sup> there is a shortage of well-trained caregivers, which is projected to intensify in the coming years. In addition, the education and training available to such workers varies greatly across the nation. The IOM's report *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce* bluntly states that "the education and training of the direct care workforce is insufficient to prepare these workers to provide quality care to older adults." This situation needs to be addressed if efforts to promote home and community-based care are to be successful. Poor care can lead to deterioration in health or functional status and lead to transfers to more expensive institutional settings.<sup>3</sup> In-home care requires a unique set of skills, including personal care, effective communication and understanding, proper nutrition and meal preparation, and maintaining a clean living environment. It is critical that there be standards to ensure quality caregiver training in these areas.

Moreover, the needs of family caregivers, who play a critical role in caring for our older population, go largely unaddressed. A recent article in *Health Affairs* observes how family caregivers are often considered the bedrock of long-term care, but more demanding tasks are being shifted to them without the requisite skills and training. It further argues that enhancing their involvement, training, and support could reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and improve patient outcomes.<sup>4</sup> The role of family caregivers will remain vital in the coming years, and a critical way to support them is to provide caregiver skills training, both practical skills and related skills such as stress management and time management.

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## Community Colleges Can Help Address Long-Term Care Policy Goals

Community college caregiver training programs, such as those sponsored by the CTI, have the potential to play a key role in the effort to keep elders in the community longer. Many community colleges are well-positioned to provide such training through their existing health professions training infrastructure and their mission to meet the needs of their local community. Under the CTI, community colleges across the country established new certificate programs for home health aides; incorporated home care skills training into existing nursing assistant curricula; and/or launched programs to improve the skills and knowledge of family caregivers. They also sponsored conferences and workshops focused on caregiving, developed peer mentoring programs, and even employed technology such as on-line training to deliver caregiver training. These successful efforts expanded and enhanced caregiver training at community colleges, and helped launch new partnerships between the colleges and public and private entities to sustain caregiver training.

The caregiver training programs at community colleges should be expanded throughout the nation to promote quality training for in-home caregivers and family caregivers, to support these individuals as a primary long-term care resource, and to ensure quality home and community-based care. The various initiatives undertaken by policymakers to advance long-term care reform and rebalancing can draw on the resources and expertise of community colleges. For example, Capital Community College in Connecticut is exploring a collaboration with state agencies involved in their 'Money Follows the Person' initiative to train individuals who provide home-based care to those returning to their homes from long-term care facilities. Similarly, the 'Cash and Counseling' program allows elders to pay friends and family members to provide their care, and clearly would benefit from the various caregiver training courses that the community colleges have initiated. As these and other programs grow in size and scope, ensuring a foundation of knowledge and skills, as well as ongoing education

and training, is critical to their success. Community colleges, as evidenced by the CTI, can meet these challenges and play a key role in meeting both consumer demand and public policy goals.

## Conclusion

There is a general consensus that training for in-home caregivers needs to be improved to deal with a growing older population and respond to the trend toward remaining in the community longer. The extensive network of community colleges across the United States has the experience and resources to provide quality and cost-effective training to these caregivers. The ILC's unique Caregiver Training Initiative has demonstrated the efficacy of using community colleges to develop and disseminate caregiver training, and these efforts need to be recognized and harnessed by policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders in order to address the needs of our older population, now and in the future.

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*James P. Nyberg is Director of the Rhode Island Association of Facilities and Services for the Aging (RLAFSA) and a Health Policy Consultant for the International Longevity Center-USA.*

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1. Caregiving Project for Older Americans (2006). Caregiving in America. ILC-USA: New York.
  2. Institute of Medicine. Retooling for an aging America: building the health care workforce. Washington, D. C.: National Academies Press; 2008
  3. Stone R, Dawson S. The Origins of Better Jobs Better Care. *The Gerontologist* Vol. 48 Special Issue 1 (2009: 5-10).
  4. Levine C, Halper D, Peist A, Gould D. Bridging Troubled Waters: Family Caregivers, Transitions, and Long-Term Care. *Health Affairs*. Vol.29 No.1 (2010: 116-124).

The **Caregiving Project for Older Americans** is an action-oriented collaboration that aims to improve the nation's caregiving workforce through training, the establishment of standards, and the creation of a career ladder. Bolstering support for family caregivers is another major goal of the project. A joint venture of the International Longevity Center-USA and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education, the effort combines the talents of a policy research center with a clinical outpatient and health education program.

The **International Longevity Center-USA** is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan research, education, and policy organization whose mission is to help individuals and societies address longevity and population aging in positive and productive ways, and to highlight older peoples' productivity and contributions to their families and society as a whole. The organization is part of a multinational research and education consortium, which includes centers in the United States, Japan, Great Britain, France, the Dominican Republic, India, South Africa, Argentina, the Netherlands and Israel. These centers work both autonomously and collaboratively to study how greater life expectancy and increased proportions of older people impact nations around the world.

The **Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education** of Northwest Arkansas provides older adults and their families with education, health care, information resources and other services for more positive aging. Education services include unique in-home caregiver training programs, public programs on positive aging, and professional programs to improve the geriatric expertise of health care professionals and students. Health care services include comprehensive clinical care and rehabilitation by an interdisciplinary team of geriatric professionals. The Schmieding Center is a partnership of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, the Area Health Education Center-Northwest, and Northwest Health System.

**MetLife Foundation** was established by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate citizenship and community involvement. Grants support education, health, civic and cultural programs, with a focus on addressing shifting U.S. demographics through its work, including the growing number of older adults in America. More information about the Foundation is available at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).



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