

Ensure All Seniors Have Access to Safe, Affordable Housing with Services

Safe, affordable housing can help older adults optimize their health and independence when it is specialized to include features such as age-appropriate accessibility and design, “Resident Assistants” who can help make connections with community social, recreational, and wellness services, or amenities such as dining, housekeeping, and transportation. Below are two key, low-cost strategies that the State can take in this year’s budget to strengthen this critical foundation for aging well while reducing Medicaid spending.

Establish and Fund the Affordable Independent Senior Housing Resident Assistance Program: LeadingAge New York urges the Legislature to invest \$10M over five years to support Resident Assistant positions in subsidized and income-restricted independent rental housing for low-income seniors. Resident Assistants are proven to help older adults avoid higher levels of care by being available on request to help them navigate the network of health and social supports they need to age safely in place. However, without State operational support, most providers have little or no avenue outside of charitable donation to maintain a much-needed Resident Assistant staff person.

Based on a rigorous New York-based study of the [Selfhelp Active Services for Aging Model \(SHASAM\)](#) – one successful Resident Assistant program – and [the low, two percent rate](#) at which Selfhelp’s residents must enter a nursing home each year, we estimate that a \$10M investment in State funds over five years in the program proposed in bill numbers A.1948 (Rosenthal)/S.956 (Kavanagh) could support Resident Assistants in at least 16, 100-unit affordable senior housing buildings, which would serve 1,600 or more low-income older adults and generate a net State-share Medicaid savings (after the \$2M investment) of at least \$4.5M annually. This is a low-cost initiative that leverages the potential of existing senior housing properties not only to create a significant return on investment, but to improve quality of life for low-income older adults and alleviate pressure on higher levels of care that are more workforce-intensive.

Study Low- and Middle-Income Senior Housing Needs: As the percentage of older New Yorkers steadily increases, the State’s spending plans must evolve to better address the housing-related needs of low- and middle-income older adults. Less than seven percent of the funds included in recent five-year spending plans for Homes and Community Renewal are reserved for low-income senior housing development, and funds designated for middle-income rental development are generally committed to projects serving individuals and families, limiting the options available to and appropriate for older adults who are not wealthy enough to afford market-rate rentals. LeadingAge New York recommends a State-directed study to evaluate the housing-related needs of low- and middle-income older adults, helping to ensure that future spending plans are balanced and effective for New York’s aging population.

Given the growing population of older adults and the workforce challenges plaguing higher-level health and long-term care settings, the State must invest in modest and innovative programs that support healthy aging NOW – before our independent seniors need more advanced care.

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