

## Why Iowa should lead on aging issues

John Hale, A Better Iowa contributor 2:51 p.m. CDT July 28, 2016



(Photo: Ryan McVay/Getty Images)

When it comes to issues of aging and caregiving, it's time for action.

That's not a new idea. It's been suggested in studies and reports over a period of decades. As illustration:

- 1990: The Congressional Claude Pepper Commission
- 2006: The National Commission on Quality Long-Term Care
- 2013: The Presidential Commission on Long-Term Care.

Each of these efforts called for action. They warned of a coming perfect storm — more people living longer, needing more services and supports in later life, with fewer people available to provide them.

The response to these warnings from our elected officials has largely been to acknowledge the challenges and then do nothing.

The typical rationale has been "those problems are down the road; they can be dealt with later. Right now we have other more pressing problems."

In 2016, these problems are no longer "down the road" — they are here. They are now. And they cry out for leadership.

Consider:

- 750,000 baby boomers live in Iowa; that's 1 in every 4 of us. We're near or in "retirement," and we're showing our age.
- The old are getting older. Some of the fastest growing population segments in Iowa are in the 85-99 and 100+ age brackets.
- Seven out of every 10 Iowans over the age of 65 will need support and assistance to maintain some degree of independence.
- More than 300,000 family and informal caregivers in Iowa are providing these services and support on an ongoing basis. Due to smaller family size, geographically dispersed families, and more families where both spouses work full time, it's getting harder and harder for them to perform the caregiving needed.
- Approximately 75,000 members of the paid direct care workforce in Iowa provide long-term services and support. It's one of Iowa's fastest growing and highest demand occupations. It's also one of the most difficult occupations to recruit people for, and to keep them in.

These facts and others lead to a series of questions:

- What can be done to make sure that longer lives are better lives?
- How can we help people stay healthier longer, and how can we ensure that people's money lasts as long as they do? What is needed to keep aging Iowans active and engaged in their communities?
- As people lose their abilities to live independently, who will help them, where, how well and at what cost? Who will pay?

The data and the questions can be overwhelming. So instead of action, we get more research, commissions and reports.

The option? Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work — together.

The challenge is this: Where will the leadership come from?

Washington D.C. is paralyzed by partisan politics. It's up to one of the state's to step forward and show what can be done.

I nominate Iowa.

Why? We have an aging population; talented leaders in government, business, labor and education; and strong non-profit, philanthropic and faith communities.

We have passionate groups like Elevate Aging that are out in front, providing opportunities for Iowans to be heard, and working to create an agenda for action.

My ask of Iowan's this: Speak up. Share your concerns and tell your stories to elected and appointed government officials and leaders in your communities. Do the same when a candidate for elected office calls or knocks on your door.

Share your thoughts and ideas with the Register, on social media and with me.

Talk about the challenges of growing older, of being a family caregiver, of being an employer trying to support employees who are family caregivers, of being a paid direct care worker in home or facility-based care, or of being a service provider trying to find and keep good direct care staff to better serve older Iowans.



John Hale (Photo: Special to the Register)

Leaders get interested in and take action on issues that people talk to them about. Let's make sure they hear much more about the issues of aging and caregiving.

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### Join the conversation on aging in Iowa

When: Thursday August 4, 10 a.m. to noon

Where: Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Mason City, Waterloo

Hosted by the Iowa Area Agencies on Aging and the Elevate Aging Collaborative

For locations and more information about these free events, contact LifeLong Links™ at 1-866-468-7887



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