

If you're an older Iowan, you're not a priority

John Hale, A Better Iowa contributor Published 1:42 p.m. CT June 9, 2017 | Updated 3:56 p.m. CT June 9, 2017



(Photo: KatarzynaBialasiewicz/Getty Images/Stockphoto)

648 CONNECT 4 TWEET 8 LINKEDIN 4 COMMENT EMAIL MORE

There, I've said it. I've felt it for a long time, under both Democratic and Republican leadership at the Iowa Capitol.

But now, it's worse. It's time to speak up.

Just look at the results of the recent legislative session in Iowa:

- Significant cuts for elder abuse initiatives, the services of the Area Agencies on Aging, the Department on Aging and the Office of Long Term Care Ombudsman
- Cuts to existing programs, and failure to create needed programs, that address immense challenges in recruiting and retaining the health and long-term care workforce needed to support aging Iowans
- No funding to address violent or sexual offenders in Iowa's nursing homes
- A failure to address the needs of 300,000+ family caregivers supporting their loved ones
- A lack of funding or initiatives to deal with growing housing, transportation, and financial security concerns

Where funding existed, it was substantially reduced. Where funding or other initiatives were needed, they were either not discussed or not seriously addressed.

The impacts are real, significant and disturbing for Iowa's aging population and those who care for and support them. They include:

- Waiting lists for things like home delivered meals and assistance with chores around the house
- Denial of requests for, or delays in getting, financial help for emergency prescriptions or money to help with rent, a ramp to be built to a home's entry, etc.
- Fewer or delayed investigations of elder abuse
- Less response to complaints about the care being provided in nursing facilities

When I talked to legislators during the recent session about taking actions to improve the quality of life for older Iowans and their caregivers, I was typically told something like this: "It's a good idea and we'd like to do it, but we just don't have the money."

"We just don't have the money" is not a reason; it's code for "This is not a priority for me or my party."

Iowa's general fund budget for next year spends more than \$7.2 billion — that's billion. The budget for the Department on Aging and the Office of Long Term Care Ombudsman is a little more than \$12 million — less than one quarter of one percent of the total.

There's money available. Aging issues are simply not a priority for its use.

Many in Iowa find that hard to believe. We rank seventh in the nation in the percent of our population 65 and over. One out of every four Iowans is a baby boomer approaching their 60s and 70s. People 85 and over are one of the fastest growing segments of the population.

And yet aging is not a priority? Really?

The current situation is unacceptable. Iowans deserve better.

How do we make it better?

We don't do it by:

- Accepting the status quo and rationalizing "That's just the way it is; there's nothing we can do about it."
- Being angry and going on a rant.

We can make things better by:

- Looking for opportunities. Here's a big one: We have a new governor in Iowa, and plenty of candidates who want to take her place. Let's give all of them a chance to show that they understand the challenges facing Iowa's aging and caregiving population, and will commit to addressing them.
- Expecting more from our legislators. It's time for Iowans to hold their legislators' feet to the fire. Let them know that you don't support the decisions they've made and that your vote for them in the future depends on them making aging and caregiving issues a greater priority.
- Becoming an aging activist. There is a saying in politics that "You are not going to get something you don't ask for." So, start asking.

The bottom line: We need more leadership and more ideas.

I'll ask you for both. Show leadership by getting engaged in the issues. Offer up ideas on how we can get beyond the status quo on aging and caregiving and the conversation stopping statement that "we just don't have the money."

I've got some ideas; I bet you do too. Share them with the Register or with me. I plan to discuss your ideas in a future column!



(Photo: Special to the Register)

JOHN HALE is a contributor to A Better Iowa. Along with his wife, Terri, he owns The Hale Group, an Ankeny-based consulting, advocacy and communications firm that provokes thought and action on aging and caregiving issues. Contact: hale_john@msn.com

Sign up for the Opinion newsletter

Email Address Confirm email

Signing up for newsletters indicates you agree with our [Terms of Service](#). If you decide that you no longer want to receive a newsletter, you can unsubscribe or manage your subscriptions using links located at the bottom of each newsletter.