

Opening Statement by Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on "Long-Term Care and Medicaid"
April 27, 2005

Mr. Chairman, I welcome this hearing today.

Anyone who is familiar with Medicaid recognizes the critical role it plays in providing long-term care services to senior and disabled Americans at a time in their lives when they are vulnerable and in need of help.

This is a critical benefit, and Medicaid has played a crucial role in providing it, and improving and enforcing standards of care in nursing homes in this country.

Of course, we all recognize that Medicaid needs improvement in the coverage it provides. It needs to do a better job of providing services in the community so that people can stay independent and at home as long as possible. That is a reform that I hope we can all support.

But I want to make one thing very clear: I am in strong disagreement with those who say that it is the very existence of the Medicaid safety net that has caused people to fail to have the resources to pay for their own long-term care needs.

And I am in strong disagreement with those who would punitively require seniors to take out reverse mortgages on their homes, or buy private long-term care insurance policies that they may not be able to afford, in order to be eligible for assistance from Medicaid.

There is and should be a role for both private and public approaches to helping people with their long-term care needs. But reducing our fiscal commitment to Medicaid, or finding ways to deny its help to needy seniors and persons with disabilities, is not the right answer.

I hope we can approach this subject by looking for ways to offer more options to people, and helping them access what best serves their needs.

I hope we can fairly look at how we can better meet our financial responsibilities to the very vulnerable beneficiaries who depend on Medicaid's help, to the providers who struggle to provide high quality service, and to the States who we have asked unfairly to bear much of the burden of the cost of services to the very population that Medicare was supposed to serve.

And I hope we can do this by looking at how we need to improve our policy, not how we can slash \$10 billion or \$20 billion Federal dollars out of the Medicaid program. Because making policy in that context will surely lead to disaster.