

Symposium A5: Health Policy Research in Nursing

Factors Affecting State Policies for Home-Based Long Term Caregiver

Christine Cekarrelli, PhD, RN, Elms College, Chicopee, MA

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to describe the factors that have impeded or facilitated the development of publicly funded state programs to support long-term home caregiving.

Background: Despite the growth of care facilities and communities offering long-term care (LTC) services in the United States, most care is provided by unpaid family members in the home. The caregiving experience can be accompanied by losses in physical and psychosocial health, dependent on the individual appraisal of stress or burden and the benefit of outside assistance. Since public state resources pay for LTC services through the Medicaid program once personal funds are exhausted, some states recognize the value of unpaid caregivers and establish programs that assist them directly or indirectly.

Methods: A two state case study, conducted in Connecticut and New Jersey, facilitated in-depth data collection from government documents and reports, informant interviews, and observation of select meetings and conferences. Atlas ti, a qualitative data analysis program, was used to facilitate organization and coding of the data.

Results: Findings consisted of a chronology for each state that described phases of policy development affecting family caregiving within the context of long-term care. Results demonstrated that most factors affecting policy development were internal to the state---especially the state fiscal environment and level of advocacy both inside and outside of government for policies that benefit family caregiving. Other state-related factors included state agency structure, bureaucratic expertise and capacity, executive branch support, risk of legal liability, and regulatory constraints. External state factors were federal policy changes supporting home and community-based care, judicial decisions, and interstate influence.

Conclusions and Implications: The study has policy implications for not only existing theories about state-level policy development, but will also affect future nursing practice, research, and policy regarding advocacy for home-based long-term caregivers.