

## **JGCOLUMNS**



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## Wisdom of the aged

### Support seniors, via Medicaid and in other ways

#### Lisa Terry

If America's youth are the key to our future, then our nation's seniors hold the key to understanding our past.

As a registered nurse in Indiana, I am blessed with the opportunity to work with and learn from tons of incredible residents who live here. Some of my residents have spent their entire lives in Indiana, some were born in other countries, and some served in our nation's military. All have had unique, wonderful and rich life experiences.

I encourage all who can to spend time with our community's seniors, and there is no better time than the present. International Day of Older Persons was Monday. The day represents an opportunity for us all to celebrate and honor those among us who have lived a long life.

Indiana's nursing home residents are among a rapidly growing number of Americans older than 65 who are projected to outnumber those younger than 18. For many of these people, nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities are providing them with critical long-term care, not to mention giving back to the communities we serve.

But to truly understand and care for our nation's aging population, we need to recognize what made much of their care possible – Medicaid. Enacted in 1965 as part of the Social Security Act, Medicaid was designed to provide health care services to low-income individuals, primarily those who are aged or disabled.

Many forget that hundreds of thousands of the elderly are insured by Medicaid, which pays for long-term care for the majority of those in nursing communities. Far too many people believe the program is a bloated welfare program taken advantage of by people who try to game the system. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Before Medicaid was created, many of America's seniors were struggling to pay for their costly hospital medical bills. In fact, before 1965, only 60 percent of people older than 65 had health insurance. But now, thanks to Medicaid and other federal insurance programs, 93.7 percent are covered, according to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

This coverage provides a crucial safeguard for many seniors in our state who otherwise might not be able to receive top-rate care. The belief that Medicaid is only for people who don't want to work is nothing more than a disservice to those who need it.

In appreciation of International Day of Older Persons, let's make time to honor and visit with our seniors. And let's remember that Medicaid is making it possible for our aging Hoosiers to receive long-term care in facilities across the state. I've learned so much from my residents, and I'm eternally grateful that I get to do what I love every day.

Lisa Terry is director of nursing services at Heritage Park in Fort Wayne, part of American Senior Communities.