Growing Chorus Sings the Praises of Homecare and Hospice

What do America’s lawmakers say about home care and hospice? Many of them have expressed their thoughts at National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC) meetings over the years. So have many of the top opinion makers in the U.S. A number of them have experienced home care or watched a loved one who is dying comforted by hospice. Others have gone on home care visits for an up close and personal look at what the nurses do. And what they have seen has made them believers. The people who appear here come from different generations. They represent different political persuasions, but they speak with a common voice when they say home care and hospice make society better for us all.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME)

On Saturday, I delivered a eulogy for a dear friend who had just died. Thanks to hospice, her passing was a peaceful one.

Home care has enabled millions of our most frail and vulnerable elderly people to receive care just where they want to be — not in a hospital, not in a nursing home, although sometimes these clearly are necessary — but rather in the comfort and the security and the privacy of their very own home.

You are saving Medicare billions of dollars. That is why I find it ironic that the Medicare hospice benefit is constantly coming under attack.

If one of our goals is to prevent unnecessary hospital readmissions, we need to do a better job on that transition to home. Home health care is absolutely essential to achieving that goal.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

I had a loved one die at home. It is to this day one of the great lessons of my life to have him die at home without pain. Another person in my life who died was a fiercely independent woman. She left a directive that she wanted to die at home, but she happened to be in a place where you are intubated if you don’t have your bracelet. She died alone and we still have a bit of pain from that experience in contrast to the warm echo we had from the first experience.

Thank you for humanizing that moment we all must face and that we often manage so badly.

I want to thank you across three dimensions. The more we keep people at home, the more we keep costs down. Independence is something we don’t appreciate till we lose it. Home care and hospice allow for more independence in people’s lives.
Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)

You do a great deal to keep people out of nursing homes. I never met anyone who came to me and said, ‘I’m dying to get into a nursing home.’

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

You are such a critical piece of the health care puzzle. Home health and hospice really play a critical role in the delivery of care to patients. The fact of the matter is that it’s lower cost to be able to provide care in the home setting. We need to make sure Medicare reimbursement rates are improved.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE)

The work you do is important, and together we’re making progress. What you do with your life works. Do more of that.

My mom’s name was Jean. She passed away five years ago and she was the sweetest person in the world but she had dementia. Her husband died, and she was left alone. Yet she was able to remain in her home thanks to people like you. She finally went into an institution, then hospice kicked in, and my mother bounced back.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

Home care saved me when my daughter was a little baby and had to be fed through a nose tube. Home health has meant so much to me because of my own personal experience. I have a special place in my heart for the work you do.

As we see more and more people wanting to stay at home and maintain their independence, we will have to look at the whole issue of caregiving, including how to help family members who are caring for loved ones. Under health care reform, we need to deliver care that’s good and efficient. Clearly, home health care is a way to go there.

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)

We understand how valuable you are. We know home care and hospice is a win-win; not only can you deliver great outcomes, but you are incredibly cost-effective. We save money by home care and hospice, and we want to make it possible for more people to get these services.

Sen. Arlen Specter (D-PA)

I know it’s a constant battle to maintain funding for home care and hospice, and I want you to know I respect very much what you do. I do think health care reform worked out reasonably well, and in that process your voice was very, very important. Together, we can work to improve and adjust health care reform, and I believe we can make this a better society for us all.
Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI)

For me, home care and hospice workers, who are doing all the hard work of caring for so many people every day, are the real heroes. I know from my own family and friends and I have experienced first hand the value of care and services you provide in our communities.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR)

I’ll do everything I can to stop ill-advised cuts to Medicare home health and hospice.

To me a country as good and strong and rich as ours ought to be for home care and hospice for purely moral reasons. But I think we should also say as part of this discussion that even if you don’t make that moral judgment, you ought to be supporting home care and hospice for purely financial reasons. What we know based on all the evidence we’ve gathered in working with older folks, and what you know because you see it in your community every single day is that older people often don’t have this option. If people don’t have the option to receive care in their homes, then as sure as night follows day, they are going to need more expensive care.

Rep. Artur Davis (R-AL)

Many of the rural counties in my district don’t have the hospitals. They don’t have the conventional medical structures, so home health and hospice is a very important part of the delivery network that we have.

Rep. James McGovern (D-MA)

You need to have a seat at the table because what you do is so incredibly important. You provide the kind of care we want people to have when they have chronic illness or they need hospice care and so on, so they can be home with their families, with their loved ones, and in their familiar settings. I’ve been on hospice visits, and I’ve seen first hand the work that is done.

One of the things I admire so much is how lovingly and with such care and compassion you do your jobs. That’s what I would want for my loved ones, to be in the care of someone like you.

I have been on home care visits and I’ve been educated on home health care and hospice by the people in Massachusetts who work in the field. They’ve shown me not only the incredible human caring that goes on but also the financial savings. It makes absolutely no sense for us to short-change what you do.

No organization is more respected or has greater influence on the development of healthcare policy than the National Association for Home Care & Hospice and no executive is more respected and admired than Val J. Halamandaris.

Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX)

I believe that providing full funding to home health care is an investment that leads to reduced hospital visits, fewer surgical procedures, and less health complications, and that it is an investment worth making that will drive down our health care costs in the near future. Having more long-term care options available won’t force elderly and disabled into nursing homes and more expensive care.
Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC)

As far as I’m concerned you are absolutely critical to the family who would first like to see a loved one stay at home and not go to a hospital or a nursing home. I will work with all members of Congress of both parties to make sure you not only help the family have a better quality of life, but you also help the government save money.

Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR)

We have to find ways as Democrats, as Republicans, as Americans to fulfill our promises to seniors. As a category, home care and hospice is one of the ways of providing better care and saving money.

Rep. John Lewis (D-GA)

My friends in home care and hospice, the work you do is truly the Lord’s work. You give people hope, and it’s a blessing that you are there in that difficult time. The work you do is the future of health care. We need to make sure you have the tools you need to do the job. Our struggle is not a struggle that lasts one day, one week, one month, one year, one session of Congress; it is the struggle of a lifetime.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD)

I want to thank you for the way you treat people with dignity, the way you want to be treated. You should never be apologetic that people are using your services. You not only provide the care that people want, you save us money.

Today, there are many people in our communities who need some type of assistance, but they can’t get it at the level that they need. That doesn’t make any sense whatsoever. We need to reimburse for that level of care that people need. That’ll save us money and provide better options for the people in our communities. You do that every day.

Rep. Charles Pickering (R-MS)

You meet the needs of families across this country in the daily lives of those struggling with illness, and in times of disaster, your networks and your people and your care made a tremendous difference for my state, and for that I am very grateful. Home health care and hospice and the networks of care responded to Katrina with tremendous generosity and compassion. Home health care — they fed, they cared, they made runs all over our state making sure that the elderly, the sick, and the disabled, and those who may not have been in hospitals but needed daily care got it during a very difficult time without power and supplies. Home health care made sure those needs were met.

Rep. James Langevin (D-RI)

When it comes to home care issues, this is something I live every day and I know how valuable it truly is. Home care is vital and important, and I am a believer.
General Colin Powell  
Former Secretary of State

“In some ways, We’re doing something not that different from what I did before. We’re preparing kids for battle against drugs, violence, and despair.” We win when kids follow the most important order of all: Give back to others. You have no greater obligation.”

Arianna Huffington  
(Political commentator and syndicated columnist)

Part of celebrating life is acknowledging the reality of death. We need hospice to play more of a role in our culture. We lose perspective in our lives. We think differently when we realize this is going to end. So it helps to be near people who are close to death. When people are close to death, they have a special wisdom. My mother died at home with home care.

Mark Shields  
(Political columnist and TV commentator)

All politics is local. What you bring to it is a human face and a story. Americans love stories. Here we are, two people who’ve been touched by you, and there are millions like us. You have to show how you’re allowing us not to warehouse people and allow people to share their last precious moments with those they love at home. Home care means dignity and independence. My mother had home care.

Art Buchwald  
(Political satirist and syndicated columnist)

If you don’t have family to love you, that you care about, you’re going to have a very sad and lonely life. And the people in the hospice are aware of that. They’re very aware, and they get it, that in front of all the other things, and at the end of it all, you don’t want to be, lonely!

David Gergen  
(Political consultant and former presidential advisor)

There’s this recent data that says that 70 percent of Americans want to die at home or in hospice, and yet 70 percent wind up dying in a hospital, often with lots of tubes and other things hooked up to them and without the benefit of home care or the benefit of hospice.

Alex Castellanos  
(Political commentator and political consultant)

My dad’s 88 and he had a little surgery. He came through the surgery, and a lot of the blackboard was erased. I called Home Instead, and they saved him with 24-hour care.

Tell your story. I lived here for 20 years and I didn’t appreciate you until I had to. You have to tell how you save money and improve value.