



## Increase Access to Long-Term Care for Noncitizens

### The Problem

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Patients should not be stuck living in hospitals. Yet hospitals are unable to discharge some patients to more appropriate post-acute care settings. Noncitizen patients who need post-acute care are often stuck in hospitals for months or years waiting for state funded long-term care slots. Due to citizenship status, these patients are not eligible for Medicaid. Patients may be undocumented or documented immigrants who do not meet the five-year residency threshold required under the Affordable Care Act expansion.

Washington State has a state-funded long-term care program for noncitizens. The program, which is part of the state's commitment to caring for vulnerable populations, involves funding from the Health Care Authority (HCA) for medical care and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) for residential services. However, the program only has 45 funded slots. There are regularly 80 or more patients on a waitlist to access the 45 slots. At least half of the patients on the waitlist are waiting in hospitals.

The hospital environment provides essential care for those who need immediate, intensive care. Hospitals are not set up to provide support for long term care, such as common rooms and outside space. In addition, acute care hospital beds are a finite resource. When hospital beds are occupied by patients who don't need to be in a hospital, fewer beds are available for other patients with acute care needs.

Additional funding for long-term care for noncitizens will provide patients with the right care at the right place and help maintain access to acute care facilities for other appropriate patients.

### Proposed Solution

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WSHA supports funding to increase the number of long-term care slots available for noncitizen residents who do not qualify for Medicaid. Adding 60 funded slots is appropriate to add capacity for patients waiting in hospitals and elsewhere. Based on conversations with hospitals and post-acute care providers, capacity exists in the community to care for these noncitizen patients, but funding is needed for patients to access this care.

### Budget Ask

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\$20.8 million general fund state to add 60 slots to the long-term care program for eligible noncitizens. This funding is for the biennium which includes funding for the Health Care Authority for medical care and the Department of Social and Health Services for residential care.

Funding assumptions: \$87,000 (HCA) and \$87,000 (DSHS) per slot, totaling \$174,000 per slot. \$10.4 million to add funding for 60 slots, \$20.8 million over the biennium.

## Key Messages

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- Noncitizen patients waiting for a state-funded long-term care slot are essentially stuck in limbo. These patients could be safely discharged to a post-acute setting like skilled nursing facilities or adult family homes but cannot be accepted into these settings without funding. Here are just a few patient stories:
  - A Mexican citizen who suffered severe trauma as a result of day labor work stayed in a Pierce County hospital for over a year on the waitlist for a long-term care slot.
  - A patient from Cambodia suffered a stroke. The patient was stabilized and appropriate to transfer to a skilled nursing facility within four days. Instead, he waited in a hospital for over six months before eventually returning to Cambodia.
- The noncitizen long-term care program is funded for only 45 slots. There are regularly more than 80 or more patients on the waitlist – at least half are those living in hospitals waiting for a slot.
- In May 2018, 32 patients were stuck in acute care hospitals while on the long-term care waitlist.
- Acute care beds are a finite, expensive resource. Patients who need acute care need access to these beds. Patients who need post-acute care should be discharged to appropriate settings.

## Contact Information

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