



For immediate release
May 13, 2014

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Neglect of elderly is underaddressed, new study finds

Increased spending on adult protection, as Ohio House proposes, would help

Neglect and abuse of the elderly is under-reported and under-addressed, the number of elderly Ohioans is increasing sharply, and a growing share of the elderly will be cared for in their homes instead of institutions, according to a new study by the research institute Policy Matters Ohio. These three factors require increased spending on Adult Protective Services (APS), according to the report.

“Ohio’s population of people 60 and older will grow by almost 14 percent between 2010 and 2015,” said Wendy Patton, report author. “It’s essential that we address the problem of neglect and abuse of the elderly, often labeled a ‘silent epidemic’ because it is so underreported.”

About 15,000 cases of elder abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation at the hands of a caregiver are reported in Ohio every year, but the actual number of cases is estimated to range from 75,000 to more than 214,000. The report provides three estimates of elderly abuse based on Ohio and national sources, and breaks these down for the state as a whole and for each Ohio county.

Ohio funds APS at extremely low levels, with some counties getting as little as \$2,000 a year. Nearly half the counties lack full-time caseworkers that specialize in services for adults.

The report recommends, at a minimum, that the Ohio Senate approve the \$10 million appropriation for APS proposed in the House appropriations bill of the Mid-Biennium Review. This would allow counties to provide better staffing and services for seniors who suffer from abuse or neglect. Providing the \$20 million recommended by an advocacy coalition would do substantially more to protect Ohio seniors.

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Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.