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## Florida's seniors get new champion: the Coalition for Silver Solutions

### Trio of lobbying groups join forces to focus on state-specific issues

The Florida Health Care Association, AARP and LeadingAge Florida have formed a new Coalition for Silver Solutions.

The group is tasked with lobbying for "sufficient funding for both home-based and long-term care," retaining Medicaid funding, and working to "formulate long-term strategies that will guide Florida as it deals with the unique and increasing challenges of the state's large and growing population of seniors," according to a statement from the group.

The coalition's formation was announced at a press conference at the Capitol on Wednesday. Among the speakers was Jeff Johnson, state director of AARP Florida.

"Our coalition is joining together to urge Florida's leaders to prepare for this great blessing and new reality, and we need a smart approach," Johnson said. "We must make the most efficient use of public resources by ensur-

ing that we have a robust spectrum of care for older Floridians at every life stage. We must adequately fund skilled nursing facilities, which meet a need met by no other resource.

"There will be a growing role for assisted living facilities and specialized care facilities, such as memory care centers," he continued. "A skilled, motivated, and adequate workforce is a must. And to make the best use of our public dollars, we must support family caregivers, the backbone of long term care in Florida and everywhere in America. By helping family caregivers keep frail loved ones at home or in community, we can provide care for one third to one fifth of the cost of institutional care."

Marilyn Wood, president and CEO of Opis Senior Service Group, also spoke and highlighted a known statewide labor issue.

"Our caregivers need to be better trained, highly skilled — and this need

for specialized care only compounds the current workforce crisis we're already experiencing," Wood said.

Steve Bahmer, president and CEO of LeadingAge Florida, echoed that concern as well.

"We're in the midst of a severe and deepening workforce shortage, and the projected increase in older adults who will need care in the coming years increases the urgency of the need for solutions," Bahmer said. "In the short term, the solution is to provide adequate funding for long term care and home and community based services providers. In its simplest form, funding supports staffing, and staffing drives quality."

The Coalition for Silver Solutions plans to host a Silver Summit in late 2019, in advance of the 2020 legislative session, to discuss "long-term policy options," the group's statement said. Video of the full press conference can be found at <https://bit.ly/2V3s2fh>.