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Just a few follow up bits of interesting information that came from Senator King’s Congressional VA Committee on Veterans Affairs hearing on Long-Term Care for Veterans in Maine. So, first, adults in the US over 65 are on pace to outnumber children under 18 by 2034 which is putting a greater demand on heath service. 80% of veterans will need long-term services and support. In the past, most of that support has come from family members. Right now, 50% of those in the VA healthcare system are over 65. Over the next 11 years, the number of veterans in the VA healthcare system will decrease by 8% but the number of enrollees who are 85 and over will increase 73%. The number of women enrollees aged 85 and older will increase 127%. The VA’s biggest challenges, says the VA Director of Geriatrics and Extended Care, are an adequately trained work force, addressing the gaps in geographic access to care, and the need for more specialized care such as for dementia. It is estimated that 90% of Americans prefer to age in place. To address that, the VA is emphasizing programs that provide “Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS).” In 2022, the VA spent $3.9B on HCBS and plans to accelerate the increase to the availability of these services. Not said at the hearing is that only veterans that are 70% or over have long term residential care paid for by the VA. So for those not 70% or over, the need to be able to stay at home longer is extremely important for most of us.

The State Department of Human Services uses the term “Long-Term Services and Support (LTSS) to describe the range of services including caregiver support, home care, adult day care, residential services and nursing facilities. Medicare nationally paid for 44.3% of LTSS while the VA paid less than 2%. In Maine, 42% of the veterans in Maine Veteran Homes are funded by MaineCare. That means 42% of the veterans have to meet the MaineCare financial requirements. The State’s Director of Aging and Disability Services states that attracting and maintaining a well-trained workforce is the single greatest challenge facing LTSS in Maine.

I image that most of the readers of this column fit into the over 65 year category. I can also safely guess that the majority of us are under the 70% disability rating, and even those that are, would like to stay at home just as long as possible. The VA currently has a number of programs available to us now, but based on the leadership of the VA’s comments, HCBS programs are being expanded and more programs forthcoming. All this just highlights the importance of attending the VA Summit on Long-Term Care in Maine being planned at our American Legion Hall in August, date to be announced.

This Monday, February 12th, is the Post meeting with dinner at 5:30 and the meeting at 6PM.