

The Power of Advocacy

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The Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State (CDPAANYS) had a busy March. The annual state budget process had us discussing regulation of fiscal intermediaries (FIs) and higher wages for personal assistants (PAs), many of whom had gone without a pay raise since 2006, and some of whom had actually seen wages go down.

We also suddenly found ourselves defending Medicaid itself, as Congress attempted to end the entitlement program and cut New York's plan by billions.

I am very happy to report we won all three efforts, largely because of FIs, PAs, and consumers who worked hard to make the victories possible.

Our work and advocacy started in September and October, when we asked consumers to fill out a survey about your experience hiring and keeping PAs.

The results were astounding, and when we published them in our report "The High Cost of Low Wages," the Department of Health and the Legislature took notice.

Of course, one of the main ways we promoted the report was through our testimony at a Home Care Workforce hearing held by the Assembly. At these hearings, which took place in Albany and New York City, dozens of consumers and PAs showed up to talk about the difficulty they were having recruiting and retaining new staff.

The stories were compelling and painted a vivid picture that created a true sense of urgency.

This urgency was only bolstered by the hundreds that turned out for our annual Lobby Day. Despite a snow storm that hammered Albany and the Hudson Valley that day, we had an enormous turnout.

The dedication of everyone that came up caused Legislators' to pay even more attention.

Finally, each time we wrote asking for your letters to Congress or your local legislators, you responded. We sent thousands of messages to state and federal elected officials this year. It is that kind of response that gets them to pay attention, and they did. Nationally, we contributed to the campaign that made two Republican members pledge to vote against the block granting of Medicaid. At the state level, we moved our priorities after years of fighting.

And to be clear, the fight is not over. We had some big wins, thanks to your hard work and advocacy. But, we need to make sure that the pressure stays on.

The changes to wages mean nothing if plans are not forced to renegotiate what they pay FIs. Without proper reimbursement, FIs will just have to shut their doors. This will be the first piece of advocacy.

Also, Congress' attempts to change Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act are not over, they have just begun. We will need all of you to rise to the occasion time and again to defend Medicaid.

But you've done it once, and I think we will only build on that moving forward. Thank you for your support.