An Oregon organization is sounding the alarm on the state's weakening safety net for low-income seniors in long-term care.

A Portland State University report found that while Medicaid reimbursement for community-based long-term care declined by 3 percent, when adjusted for inflation, from 2008 to 2014, the acuity of the clients in community-based care has increased.

Almost half of community-based care facility residents have some form of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, according to the report.

Community-based care facilities include assisted living, residential care and memory care facilities that serve older people with ongoing assistance with daily activities, including personal care and medications.

Jim Carlson, director of Oregon Health Care Association, said policymakers should use the findings to inform their decision-making. He said if Medicaid reimbursements for this population continues to not keep up with inflation, access issues could arise and private-pay clients would have to make up the gap through price hikes.

However, the governor's budget does not recommend an increase in the Medicaid budget for service providers in long-term care, Carlson said.

"In the governor's budget, there were no increases recommended for any kind of cost-of-living adjustments or adjustments in payments for service providers and already, before we even go into the two-year period, we've already seen that we're allocating fewer resources," he said. "That problem is only going to get greater in the next two years. If they don't address it at all in this budget cycle, we're going to be that much further in the hole."

The governor's office did not respond to requests to comment on the budget.

"The findings from this study fill an important gap in our understanding of Oregon's senior population, staff and caregivers, and community-based care settings as a whole," said Paula Carder, associate professor at Portland State University Institute on Aging, in a statement. "The demand for community-based care is expected to increase as our population ages, and we hope this report will be used to inform policy decisions that ultimately improve the lives of aging Oregonians."

Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, who is on the budget subcommittee for human services, said she had not read the PSU's report and could not comment on its findings.

She said she did not believe there were any talks to decrease Medicaid reimbursement rates for community-based care providers, and that most likely the current level will be maintained. The report has not been discussed by the subcommittee, she said.

The rise in Alzheimer's and dementia is worrisome because they cannot be prevented, Carlson said, and yet they will continue to be significant drivers of service needs and costs for older Oregonians.

The Oregon Health Care Association also reported in March that 31,000 Oregonians depend on Medicaid every month for long-term care and that reimbursement rates have not kept up with costs.

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