



Fact Sheet: State Home Care Program FY26 Budget Deficit

FY26 Underfunding of State Home Care Program Puts Older Adults at Risk

Overview

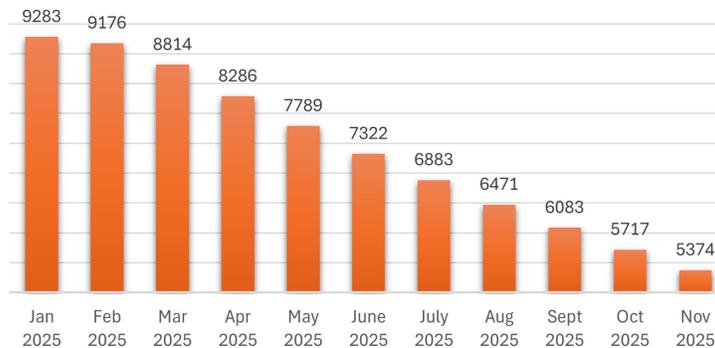
The State Home Care Program enables older adults and individuals living with Alzheimer’s Disease or related dementias to remain safely at home and avoid premature nursing home placement. This Program encompasses Home Care Basic, Home Care Percent-Based, and the Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP), and is funded through Line Items 9110-1630 (Purchased Services) and 9110-1633 (Case Management). **Despite recently imposed restrictions that have already reduced access to essential in-home services, the FY26 budget underfunds the State Home Care Program by an estimated \$16 million.** This shortfall jeopardizes the ability of vulnerable Massachusetts residents to maintain their independence and safety in their own homes and communities. Without additional funding, more enrollment restrictions will need to be put in place. This means Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) will be able to serve fewer individuals and families in need of services to maintain their independence throughout our communities. **We urge the Legislature to fully fund the State Home Care Program in FY26 and ensure sustainable support in future budgets.**

Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP)

The Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP) supports older adults who meet the **clinical criteria for nursing home care** but do not qualify for MassHealth. **Designed to help high-risk individuals remain safely at home**, ECOP provides roughly twice the level of services available through the Basic Home Care Program. **The program primarily serves low- to moderate-income residents**, defined as those with annual incomes below \$35,601 for a single-person household in FY26.

On March 1, 2025, the Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) implemented maximum enrollment caps that have **reduced ECOP participation by 41% between February and November 2025**. These limits have already resulted in a **waiting list of more than 800 nursing home-eligible older adults** seeking ECOP services.

ECOP Consumers per Month
Cuts began 3/1/25

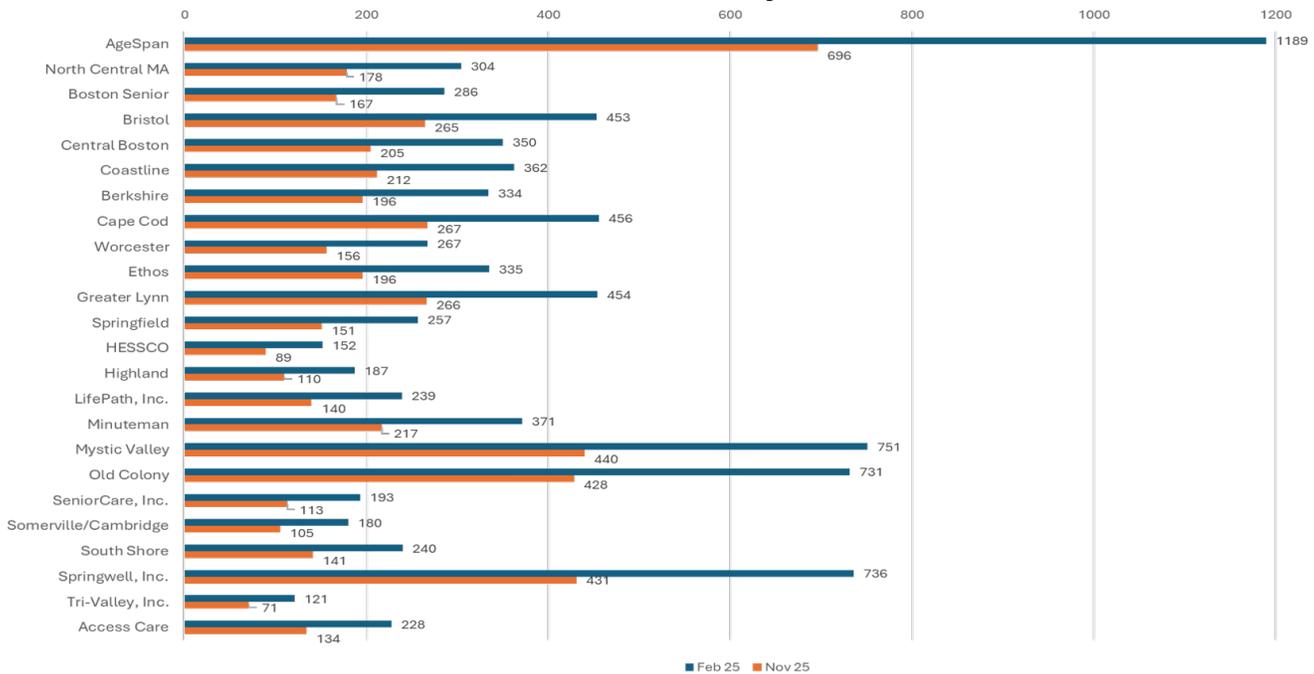


The sharp decline in enrollment reflected in this graph does not reflect a declining demand, as the need for this program continues to grow with our aging population!

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ECOP Cuts by ASAP



Home Care Program Managed Intake

In addition to the ECOP caps, AGE reinstated Managed Intake for the Home Care Program on July 1, 2025 for the first time since 2016. Applicants determined to be Priority Level 4 - those with limited support networks and a **critical unmet need for meal preparation** - are **now being placed on waiting lists** until openings arise. The ASAP network is gravely concerned that *Managed Intake could soon expand to include Priority Level 3*, which **would delay access for older adults needing help with grocery shopping**. At a time when food prices are rising and SNAP benefits have been threatened, Massachusetts should not compound these pressures by restricting access to meal preparation or grocery shopping assistance for low- and middle-income older adults striving to remain at home and avoid institutional care.

Why Adequate Funding Matters

ECOP helps older adults remain safely at home while saving the state significant costs. Supporting a consumer through ECOP costs the Commonwealth an estimated \$16,400 per year, compared to more than \$80,000 annually for nursing home care covered by MassHealth. Despite the cost-effectiveness of these community-based services, **the Home Care Program remains underfunded by approximately \$16 million in FY26**, even as service restrictions and waiting lists have expanded. With 27% of Massachusetts residents now age 60 or older, **the demand for home-based care continues to grow**. Older adults overwhelmingly prefer to age in place rather than enter institutional care, yet persistent cuts, caps, and underfunding threaten their ability to do so - and risk increasing long-term state expenditures.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Fully fund the State Home Care Program in FY26 to close the estimated \$16 million gap** and prevent further service reductions.
- ✓ Appropriate the following funding levels in FY27 to support program need and growth:
 - **FY27 Budget Request for Line Item 9110-1630, Home Care Purchased Services: \$318,042,145**
 - **FY27 Budget Request for Line Item 9110-1633, Home Care Case Management: \$128,124,879**

While this would keep the existing waiting list in place, it would allow additional nursing home level older adults to enter the ECOP program as demand for these services continues to grow.

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