

Geriatric Services, Inc.
Final Report – Friends Foundation for the Aging
October 1, 2025

1. What problem were you addressing?

The Portable Assisted Living Services (PALS) program is a licensed assisted living program (ALP). It provides a solution to the problem faced by older adults living in subsidized housing, and subsidized housing managers, when residents age-in-place and are no longer independent yet cannot afford costly assisted living facilities, do not require skilled nursing care and are reluctant to move from their own home and community. PALS provides a full complement of assisted living services within subsidized senior housing, preventing premature nursing home placement and ensuring residents' safety, and wellbeing. Unfortunately, while the model is innovative and addresses a huge and growing need, ALPs face many challenges include low reimbursement rates, unfair reimbursement policies and regulations that are geared toward facility-based providers. There remains a lack of awareness about and appreciation for ALPs, even on the part of the NJ Department of Health which licenses these programs. In addition, it can be challenging to build a census as many residents are not self-aware of their own needs, are not willing or able to pay for ALP services privately yet are reluctant to spend down resources to qualify for Medicaid Managed Long Terms Services and Supports (MLTSS) program. This past year, we have focused on addressing these challenges and barriers that interfere with the growth of this valuable model.

2. What solution did you propose to address it?

Our team contributed to the start-up of an ALP Provider Coalition over seven years ago which we hoped would bring providers together to support each other, share strategies and collaborate around advocacy and education with State policymakers, legislators and managed care organizations. We hoped that this would create a strong and unified voice and would lead to changes in reimbursement rates and policies while building awareness of the model's value and potential. This past year, the Coalition has focused on reimbursement rates and policies as well as how to bring more providers into the group and ensure that the Coalition will remain a strong resource for providers and advocate for the continued strengthening of the ALP model.

3. What actions did you take? What did you learn?

Fortunately, the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation agreed to provide funding which has supported the organization and structure of the ALP Provider Coalition thus far. Capital Impact Partners, a community development financial institution, provided leadership for the coalition and Rutgers University and other consultants have carried out research and studies to better understand the various systems that impact ALPs including the regulatory environment, reimbursement, the overall business model and develop educational materials for housing providers, managed care organizations and legislators. ALP Coalition members, including our PALS team, have met with numerous State officials and legislators, and worked very hard over many years to influence position change in reimbursement and regulations. This year, we have been very active in the Coalition's advocacy efforts, pushing for an increase in reimbursement rates and reinstatement of the ability for ALPs to bill during the GAP period, that time in between an individual becoming eligible for Medicaid and enrollment in an MCO. We have also played an active role in planning for the Coalition's continuation once Capital Impact Partners can no longer provide leadership and coordination due to the ending of its contract with the Taub Foundation.

This year, I believe we have made significant progress in educating and building awareness around the value and impact of the ALP model and the cost savings it brings to the State. Staff officials and legislators finally seem to understand the need to support this model's continued growth. Unfortunately, there is still much work to be done as housing providers and managed care organizations are still not as engaged as we hoped they would be and the Medicaid MLTSS resource limits remains at \$2000, creating a roadblock for many older adults who are reluctant to spend down assets while still living in the community.

4. How do you know your actions had an impact? Please describe those who participated, outputs and outcomes. Stories or photos are welcome.

Two major outcomes were realized this year. First, the reimbursement rate for ALPs increased by \$9.60 per day which is approximately \$292 per month. Based on our current census, this will increase our monthly revenue by approximately \$10,000. This is, I believe, the result of our Coalition educating the NJ State policy and legislative decision makers about the tremendous value of ALPs and the cost savings realized by the State of NJ when residents in subsidized housing can avoid costly nursing home placement because of the availability of an ALP. It should be noted that while ALP's daily rate was increased by \$9.60, daily reimbursement for assisted living facilities was only increased by \$1.60. This speaks to the impact of our ALP related advocacy and education. Second, after over ten years of advocacy around ALPs being eligible for reimbursement during the "gap" period, meaning the time in between establishing Medicaid eligibility and enrollment in an MCO, typically a period that is 4 – 8 weeks, we finally succeeded in having ALPs once again being able to bill for gap payment. Over the years, a tremendous amount of revenue has been lost when our PALS residents convert from paying privately to enrollment in an MCO and, ethically, we felt committed to continuing providing care despite not being able to bill during that time frame. When PALS first began providing services, we could bill during that gap period. In 2016, an arbitrary decision was made resulting in ALPs no longer being able to bill during the gap period. This has finally been addressed and we are proud of our success around this matter.

5. Is there anything else you would like FFA to know about this project?

As Friends Foundation for Aging is aware, our organization operates the only assisted living program in Bergen County. It has been challenging to sustain our PALS Program and we have invested a great deal of time, money, and effort into keeping this program viable and strengthening the overall model. We strongly believe that income should not dictate access to care and services, and we also believe that it makes no sense for older adults to be pushed prematurely into nursing homes simply because the assisted living "industry" has elected to not serve persons of modest means. At this time, with this past year's successes, and a slow but steady growth in our census, we are anticipating that, effective this month, we will reach a break-even point. The current challenge is that some of our senior and long-time employees are deserving of a salary increase yet the budget will not support these increases. We will fundraise and seek out grants to support our staff and contribute to staff stability and retention.

6. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful.

We commend the FFA for its active support of our program. Susan Hoskins has attended many of the coalition meetings and I believe that by doing so, she has gained a true understanding of the work we carry out and the systems within which we operate. We have appreciated her taking the time and interest to do so. We also appreciate the communication and reporting processes which are helpful and never burdensome.

7. Include a simple program budget/actual with income and expenses (eg. staff, program supplies, travel, etc)

Attached please find a year-to-date 2025 profit and loss statement. Please note that the income included on this report is only program revenue. It does not include the grant funding we received from the County of \$41,250 year to date or the 2025 pro-rated portion of the FFA grant. With those funds included, and thanks to our census having grown to a total of 45 residents, we are finally seeing that our program is breaking even!