

2018 SWPPA Candidates Survey Response



Candidate: Mary Popovich
State House District: 58
Campaign Website: <https://www.vote4popovich.com/>

Focus Area One: **Lottery**

Question: Several years ago the Legislature began transferring Lottery funds to the General Fund to support Medicaid programs and institutionalization, creating an \$18 million shortage in the Lottery fund for the first time since its inception. What are your thoughts about the practice of shifting lottery funds from HCBS to support institutionalization, and what position would you take in that regard?

Response: I am not in favor of taking funds that were set aside as restricted funds to put them elsewhere. I favor the money from the lottery would support elders staying in their homes to avoid institutionalization. Elders should be able to receive the care they need at home, which can provide better care and at a lower cost. The HCBS is a much needed service, therefore if they create shortages in the restricted fund, more seniors will be institutionalized and lose their right to self-determination. Medicaid is important, but using lottery funds to institutionalize seniors is appalling to me. I am active with the Centers for Active Adults in my district, and I see how hard it is for these centers to provide the services seniors were promised. I strongly advocate that lottery funds be used solely for their original intent and purpose to provide the much needed programs it was originally designed for. I would further support more programs to provide additional services to assist seniors in having safe reliable transportation, prescriptions, tax relief, home care, adult day services and any other services that would benefit their health and well-being. I will oppose any legislation that takes services away from seniors and would like to see more funding distributed to Aging Services, and Senior Community Centers..

Question: Please explain your position on the preservation and use of Lottery revenues to fund services for older Pennsylvanians.

Response: As I stated previously, the idea of the lottery was to help our seniors. We are the only country who does not give reference to our elderly citizens. As Mayor of my community, too often I see elderly folks living in the poorest of conditions and without

the resources they deserve or need. Elders should be able to stay in their homes and live out their twilight years, with the healthcare and social support they need. I am opposed to any legislation that takes services away from seniors. I would support any legislation that would increase benefits for seniors or any agencies that provide services to them

Question: Would you support or not support back filling the transfer of Lottery revenue to Medicaid programs with Lottery revenue gained through the newly authorized online sports betting in PA?

Response: I would not support this legislation.

Question: What is your position with regard to legislation that may shift revenue from the Lottery fund to private clubs and out of state promoters?

Response: I will not support this. This will only reduce funds to assist the elderly. When restricted funds get into the hands of private clubs or out of state promoters, they have no interest in helping PA seniors, they only have an interest to make a profit.

Focus Area 2: **Community Health Choices**

Question: The implementation of CHC began in the Southwestern region of PA in January. How informed are you about CHC and the potential benefits/implications it has for aging Pennsylvanians and the agencies that support them?

Response: I am not familiar with this new process. I was familiar with the Waiver Program, because my mother utilized this service. We were able to care for her at home till she passed away. I have reviewed your areas of greatest concern and I agree they are valid concerns. Programs always seem good at first, then costs start escalating and then services seem to decrease. I will support this bill as long as the tenants of this agreement are kept intact, and an adequate workforce can be readily available to provide these services. Another concern is the rate of pay for workers. To keep caregivers available to provide these services, they must make a livable wage and be given a reasonable patient to caregiver ratio. If a worker can't make a livable wage, there will be major turnovers and this can be upsetting to clients and their well being. Seniors deserve to get the services promised. Choices have to be available to the patient as well. This is going to have to be watched carefully. This is why, if elected; I want to hear from agencies that provide these services as well as keeping my eyes on rates and speaking to advocates for Seniors to make sure they get the care they need and deserve.

Question: Moving home and community waiver services to a managed care system does have several potential negative outcomes. It could threaten consumer choice, limit or restrict access to service, and limit actual service levels. How would you assure the state maintains consistent oversight of MCO's and holds them accountable for quality care and positive service outcomes?

Response: I believe their needs to be an evaluative procedure to watch for negative outcomes. Surveying the clients, and forming an Ad Hoc committee with key stakeholders in place that would provide reports to the legislative committee that governs aging. The guidelines need strict adherence and fines levied or license restriction if any agreements are not met. There needs to be a 6 month reporting requirement for outcome reporting. If elected, I would be open to any other suggestions as to how this process could be adequately monitored.

Question: Reimbursement rates for Medicaid waiver services in the Southwest region are lower than in any other region across the state, and they have been since 2012. This directly impacts the agencies and workers, who are responsible for supporting CHC in our region. What efforts will you make to advocate for fairer reimbursement rates in the Southwest region?

Response: Agencies need to be reimbursed at a fair rate. I believe workers need a livable wage, therefore to reduce attrition in the workforce, would be to pay a livable wage. Providers for Medicaid Waiver services need to be reimbursed at an appropriate rate. The rate needs to be cost effective but be able to deliver the service systems' needs. When funding is decided, all costs must be included, (e.g., wages, administrative costs). The reimbursement must be sufficient enough to enlist enough providers, to keep choice in the plan. Minimum wage needs tied to the inflation index as well as cost to provide service. If elected I would be open to other suggestions that would raise the rate setting for Medicaid Waiver Services. There should be a Quality Assurance Program in place as well.

Focus Area 3: **Older Adult Protective Services**

Question: What are your thoughts about balancing the need to protect vulnerable older adults and to assure the rights of Pennsylvania workers?

Response: I do support the Constitution and understand people do have rights. However, the senior population many times are the targets of abuse, exploitation and neglect. I believe some of the folks who have been banned may not be the type of individual that would cause harm to an elder. I also know that incidents of abuse have occurred to

elders by persons who do not have criminal records. I believe folks who have succumbed to addiction and have recovered should not have a criminal record that prevents them from employment. I am an advocate of providing whole person rehabilitation programs for those addicted to narcotics. Providing psychological and physiological care can heal the person to a functioning individual that can become productive in society. However, sexual assault or any of the other items listed in Part #3 of HB-2549, is a different story. These folks should not be eligible to work taking care of the elderly. This is not different than the ban on child molesters. Employers should always require a PA background criminal background check and FBI checks, also probation periods and training that is required to work this type of job. I also think yearly updates on criminal history should be conducted to make sure original report is still intact for employment eligibility. All requirements should be clearly stated in application and random drug testing of employees should occur. This should help manage finding an adequate work force and this screening process that would protect the elderly without discriminating against workers rights. In addition, I also believe in a livable wage for workers, so these agencies can maintain their workforce. I do believe their needs to be stronger language and more involvement with other agencies, when financial exploitation is suspected. If elected, I plan to research topics and speak to those directly involved before I support or oppose legislation. I care deeply about the security and care of our seniors and will work hard to protect them in my capacity if elected.

Question: Do you have a position on expanding efforts to recognize and address financial exploitation, which will mean including the banking and financial services industries in ways they have not been involved up to this point?

Response: I believe any efforts to recognize and address financial exploitation of the elderly should be enacted.

Question: It is estimated that the AAA's Adult Protective Services program is underfunded by as much as \$8 million. Based on the implications of HB2549, it is reasonable to expect an increase in protective services reporting. How would you propose to address this funding shortage?

Response: The first measure to ensure the lottery funds remain in a restricted fund to provide and fund these services. If this bill is enacted, then it should be clear an adequate funding stream will be needed. If a bill is introduced that will increase needed funding, a strategy should be in place to find the funds to support the legislation.

Question: As you consider your legislative priorities, where does amending the OAPS act fall?

Response: I do not want to see amendments that reduce screenings for adequate protective

services of PA older adults. As I mentioned earlier, I do not believe it violates one's rights if the provisions for employment are on the application. There may be some individuals as I mentioned earlier, that have criminal records because of addiction and now have recovered, in which perhaps their criminal record may be expunged. It is usually for stealing to support their habit. The reason I am advocating for this, is because of my interaction with the Illegal Drug Task Force in my capacity as Mayor and the results I have seen in recovery. When these folks recover, they need a job to live to avoid recidivism. This may be the only variance I support. There needs to be a wider range of required reporting, including banks; who are one of the first ones who may detect exploitation. I am not an expert on this subject matter but understand the OAPSA if the PA Older Adult Protective Services Act that has voluntary reporting by general public, requires background checks for LCT employees to get PA State Police and some FBI checks, as well as mandatory reporting for facilities including home health providers and licensed individuals. In addition, the reporting should take place even if it is on suspected, to make sure no one falls through the cracks.

Focus Area 4: **Direct Care Workforce**

Question: Given Pennsylvania's aging demographics, the increasing demand for Medicaid waiver funded services, and the current direct care workforce crisis, what recommendations might you make to assure Pennsylvania can create a robust and ready workforce, supported by living wages, able to meet the demand for care?

Response: The reimbursement rate for Medicaid must be tied to the inflation index as well. There needs to be incentive programs to provide adequate workforce to provide these much needed services. We must make sure the lottery funds are not privatized and that the funding remains for elder citizens. The most cost-effective type of care is the home based care. Therefore, any restrictions limiting this choice must be reduced. The home setting would not be as physically challenging or emotionally draining as when working in a facility where the patient to care giver is an inappropriate ratio for the health care provider. Since the Census has provided the statistics, legislators need to be proactive and make a plan for the 1 in every 3 citizens to be a senior. This is where funding education comes into play and offer not only affordable college, fund public schools, but educate students about the trades and healthcare careers. This issue needs addressed and solutions on how to get work ready students produced and how to reimburse Medicaid waiver programs adequately. Taking away the lottery money will be robbing Peter to Pay Paul and will not solve the crisis. If elected, I would be open to meet with key players to come up with strategies to solve this healthcare crisis.

Question: The most cost-effective type of care is care provided in settings of least restriction –

most commonly home. Medicaid dollars can provide more care to more consumers over a longer period of time in less expensive settings. Unfortunately, without an adequate workforce to support care in this setting, we will never fully realize the impact of this cost saving approach. The primary obstacle in building a strong direct care workforce is low wages and unstable work conditions, driven largely by low Medicaid reimbursement rates. What measures would you advocate for in changing this and improving our reimbursement rates in Southwest PA?

Response: As I stated previously, a steady stream of funding for Medicaid Services needs to occur. To keep up with rising costs, the reimbursement needs tied to the inflation index. I believe an Ad Hoc Committee to serve as an advocate for what is occurring out in the field needs to be formed to provide real data on real costs and concerns

Additional Comments

Response: I answered the questions to the best of my ability. Please understand I will always advocate for the Seniors in PA. I believe more legislators need to visit and speak with administrators of Healthcare and speak to them directly about pitfalls in the system. Communication is the first step to problem solving. Thank you.