

The Daily Item

New state program to help seniors stay in homes

by Thor Jourgensen

LYNN — Almost 200 seniors and disabled Lynn area individuals will return to their homes, if medically possible, under a new state program aimed at helping people live as independently as possible for as long as possible.

The “money follows the person” program will unfold over five years, paid for in part with \$110 million in federal money. Four local organizations, including Greater Lynn Senior Services, will initially help 165 local residents now living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, move back to Lynn and other communities.

“This program supports opportunities to provide care that is quantity over quality,” said state Medicaid Director Kristin Thorn.

John Garcia, “money follows” program director, said the money will help pay for renovations and other assistance, including wheelchair ramps and widened doorways, in homes. Garcia and Thorn said seniors as well as some disabled people in Massachusetts are in nursing homes and long-term facilities because their homes are not outfitted for their disability or because they cannot afford to pay for home care and medical assistance.

Thorn and Garcia said June 2013 state statistics list 3,000 individuals living in nursing and long-term facilities — mostly seniors — as well as younger disabled individuals. Most of those people could live in their hometown or a community where a loved one lives with support through the “money follows” program.

Thorn said federal money paid for a 2005 state program to identify people medically capable of returning to their communities and independent enough to live at home or in an assisted living or group home setting.

Since 2011, about 40 North Shore residents and 360 people living in long-term care facilities in other parts of the state have returned to their communities.

“This has given us experience to build on. Gov. (Deval) Patrick is committed to allowing people to live independently with dignity in their community,” Thorn said.

In addition to Greater Lynn Senior Services, three organizations — Senior Care Inc., North Shore Elder Services and Independent Living Center of the North Shore and Cape Ann — will work through the program to help people in long-term care facilities move back to the city and town where they lived.

“In this case, the money follows the person,” Garcia said.