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I am a middle-age, single, working woman whose grandmother and mother had Alzheimer's, and I could be a perfect candidate for a long-term care insurance policy. Why long-term care insurance?

First, it's an alternative to using your income and assets or relying on Medicaid (the taxpayers) to pay for nursing home or in-home care. In New York State, Medicaid expenditures are breaking the bank, and one major reason is that Medicaid pays the bill for 75% of New York State's 107,000 nursing home residents. With the aging of the baby boomers, it is clear that unless more of us have another way to pay for institutional care, Medicaid expenses will skyrocket beyond our ability to tax. Additionally, Medicaid was created in 1965 to cover medical costs for indigent people. You basically have to impoverish yourself to qualify.

Long-term care insurance is fairly new to the market; it was first offered in the 1970s. Today, the best policies provide coverage for nursing home care, as well as care at home, care within an assisted living facility, adult day care, and even respite care.

Like any insurance product, your premium depends on the coverage you select and in this case, on your age. For example, when purchasing long-term care insurance you buy a certain daily benefit (e.g. \$300 a day), a certain maximum time period (e.g. two years to lifetime), and a specific waiting period until the policy takes effect (e.g. 30 – 180 days).

The most often asked question about long-term care insurance is, "Should I buy it?" The answer is maybe. There is no doubt that it would significantly help every level of government if more people were to use it to pay for their care. Having a policy in place also can provide you and your family with much valued peace of mind in difficult times. Far too often families call Lifespan in crisis when they are faced with a nursing home placement that costs \$8000 to \$9000 a month. It can also ensure that you have a greater choice of services or facilities.

Many variables play into a long-term care insurance purchase decision. Your age and medical history are factors. Wait too long and policies become very expensive (in the \$5000 a year range for a 75 year-old). Wait too long and you may not qualify medically. One in four 65 year-olds is turned down for coverage. Lifespan's general recommendations include purchasing long-term care insurance between the ages of 55 and 65, working with a broker who can give you more than one insurer option, and taking your individual situation into account. A large insurer, MedAmerica Insurance Co. of NY, is headquartered in Rochester.

Long-term care insurance is an option that can preserve your assets, provide peace of mind, greater choice and save Medicaid dollars, but it is not the right option for everyone. Because it is a complicated product that requires a substantial investment, New York State funds Long-term Care Insurance Resource Centers. Monroe County's center is

located at Lifespan, where we can provide you with nothing-to-sell educational seminars and/or personalized consultations about long-term care insurance.

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