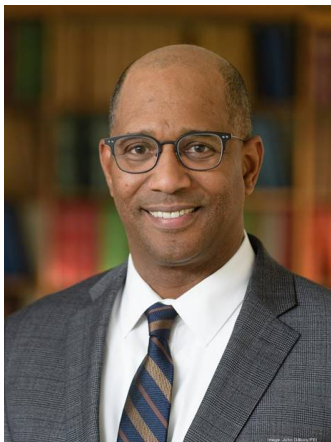


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EDITORIAL / OPINION

Op-ed: Strengthening the human infrastructure of our care economy

By Walter Ramos – President and CEO, Rogerson Communities
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Walter Ramos is president and CEO of Rogerson Communities in Roslindale, which provides housing and health care for nearly 2,300 seniors and low-income individuals and families in Greater Boston and beyond.

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As the debate continues in Washington over the size and scope of a federal infrastructure investment plan, one vital element that has been too long ignored is now at the forefront. We are more aware than ever of the critical role that “human infrastructure” plays in keeping our seniors healthy and safe.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has shined a light on the tragic consequences when the “human infrastructure” is not available to those who most need it. During the pandemic when adult day health programs were closed, our seniors were isolated at home and families could not find alternative support. When day programs finally reopened, many seniors required advanced care for chronic health conditions that went unmanaged for months when hospitals and healthcare systems were stressed to the limit. As a community, we cannot let our seniors down. We must invest in aging services by providing access to quality, affordable in-home or community-based care for aging relatives and people with disabilities.

I have worked for the last 23 years focused on ensuring better health care outcomes in Boston. I know firsthand the impact that quality affordable housing and innovative adult day health programs can have on the lives of seniors: preventing homelessness, stemming isolation, averting health emergencies, delaying long-term nursing home care and allowing seniors to age in their community

with dignity. We also know that this formula significantly reduces the burden on individual family caregivers and saves taxpayer dollars.

As the pandemic eases, led by the vaccination of seniors across the nation, we need to prepare the nation for the next great challenge to our health care system. There are 52 million people over the age 65 in the US today and that is expected to double by 2040. And, sadly, we are grossly unprepared for that challenge, putting millions of our seniors at risk. It is literally a matter of life or death for them.

That is why if we care about ensuring that our seniors are healthy and safe, we should endorse President Biden's inclusion of \$400 billion in his American Jobs Plan. Seniors and their families will finally be able to get the services and support they so desperately need. These investments will also create thousands of new jobs and give a much deserved, overdue raise and stronger benefits to our dedicated caregiving workers.

This is not a Democrat issue or a Republican issue. This is about everyone's parents and grandparents, regardless of where they live or who they vote for. It is a shared moral and civic obligation to see that all of our seniors can access affordable housing and supportive healthcare to provide them dignity in their journey.

So now it is up to Congress, and us. As the American Jobs Plan is debated in Washington, it is imperative that our elected representatives honor our aging loved ones by including these vital resources in the final legislation. It is not only about helping those elders currently in need, but each one of us who share the same dream of aging strong with dignity in the future.

Walter Ramos is president and CEO of Rogerson Communities in Roslindale, which provides housing and health care for nearly 2,300 seniors and low-income individuals and families in Greater Boston and beyond. He is also a member of both the national and state board of directors for LeadingAge.