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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR PARTICIPATES IN DISCUSSION WITH CAREGIVERS; EMPHASIZES HER COMMITMENT TO HOME CARE FOR SENIORS

Gov. Christie Whitman today demonstrated her commitment to helping senior citizens receive the care and services they need to stay in their homes and communities instead of nursing homes when she participated in a roundtable discussion with New Jersey residents who are caring for elderly relatives. The discussion was held at the Biertuempfel Senior Center in Union.

"For many New Jersey seniors, a nursing home is the right choice," the Governor said. "But it shouldn't be the only choice for every frail senior citizen. My vision is that no one should have to go into a nursing home unless they have to be there and want to be there."

"I want to reach out to all those who could live a more independent life with the help of a visiting nurse, or family and respite care, or homemaker service, or adult day care. I want to do everything possible to offer those options to them," she said.

Gov. Whitman said a number of state initiatives will make it easier for seniors to get services while staying in their homes. These initiatives will start in four counties - Union, Morris, Atlantic and Ocean - and will eventually be implemented in all counties. The initiatives include:

- The Caregiver Assistance Program which will allow county care managers to authorize payments to help certain family caregivers of Medicaid beneficiaries purchase at-home care services and goods for the beneficiary rather than placing that elderly person in a nursing home.
- The Jersey Assistance for Community Caregivers that will allow care managers to reach out to frail elderly people who are not in the Medicaid program to help them and their family caregivers receive services. Costs to recipients of these services will be determined on a sliding scale.
- The NJEASE Home Care program which provides those seniors without family support to receive traditional, personalized in-home services from home health and homemaker agencies.

The Governor said the New Jersey Statewide Respite Care Program will receive a \$1 million increase in funding in the state's fiscal year 2000 budget to give family caregivers time away from caregiving responsibilities. It will also provide them with opportunities to take courses to help them with their caregiving role and gain confidence in their critical work.

"What's more, we will help seniors in nursing homes - or about to enter one - to take advantage of community options if they can and want to do so," Gov. Whitman said. "We are expanding our Community Choice Program statewide. Counselors will interview every Medicaid beneficiary now in a nursing home to determine whether he or she would rather be in community care. If so, counselors will work to find an arrangement that works for that senior."

Gov. Whitman said through the Universal Screening Program every senior eligible to enter a nursing home will also be given a chance to talk with a counselor to consider all the options for long-term care.

