

From Cheryl Heiks, Executive Director, Delaware Health Care Facilities Association

Dear Providers, Sponsors, and Associate Members,

DHCFA and the long-term care community work collaboratively to improve care with a variety of stakeholders to deliver quality care to residents with compassion, integrity, and excellence. DHCFA is dedicated to:

- Enhancing the quality of life of individuals in our facilities by promoting high standards of care.
- Supporting its members in delivering accessible, efficient, quality long-term care and a continuum of related services to those they serve including advocacy and ongoing educational opportunities.
- Promoting an environment of trust and understanding and providing members with a quality professional organization that incorporates educational opportunities, support systems, expertise, and advocacy standards while creating a unified leadership in the long-term care community.

DHCFA's membership includes 95% of the licensed beds in Delaware includes, supported by 60 associate members and annual sponsors who provide services to providers.

Accomplishments

Advocacy

Nearly four years ago, DHCFA and our Board of Directors, together with government relations and reimbursement consultants began a dedicated Advocacy Plan to further develop relationships with legislators and stakeholders to encourage changes in reimbursement policy on behalf of our residents, staff, and facilities. In 2024, with a state and federal election, the activity intensified with increased individual meetings with legislators and opportunities to showcase the value of long-term care services.

- We had an excellent Advocacy Day, sponsored an educational table in Legislative Hall, and held several smaller, member-related advocacy meetings during the legislative session. Facilities held meetings and tours with their legislators, and we activated a coordinated online outreach through email on focused issues.
- During the June Capitol Hill visit in Washington D.C., a diverse group of leaders shared our concerns with the Delaware delegation and asked for assistance on compliance, workforce development, immigration, and the federal staffing mandate.
- The results of the state and national elections will impact policy in the long-term care industry on several fronts. DHCFA and our national partner AHCA/NCAL are well-positioned to help our industry positively impact change.

Thanks to our association's collective and ongoing advocacy, Delaware General Assembly passed a recurring Medicaid rate increase (10-14%), the first since the rates were frozen in 2008/2009 fiscal year. The increase will net nearly \$25M for Delaware's Medicaid SNF facilities. This is the third year in a row that DHCFA members' advocacy has resulted in a contribution of funds of over \$24M towards the care of Medicaid residents in Delaware's skilled nursing facilities.

- Ensured recognition of the workforce crises with the 3.28 minimum staffing flexibility through January 1, 2025.
- Several DHCFA members that are nonprofit organizations received Grant-in-Aid monies for operating cost projects and others for capital projects through the Bond Bill.

Several years of DHCFA negotiations resulted in changes to the mandatory training requirement bill for dementia care education that is significantly narrower than its original form. DHCFA and DHCFA Board members worked tirelessly to educate legislators on existing and implementation concerns. Though legislators initially crafted this bill without industry input, DHCFA and stakeholders ensured that the industry's collective voice impacted the final bill passed by the General Assembly. With the increase in activity in legislation and regulation regarding Assisted Living in Dover and federally, the DHCFA board was increased to include more members with Assisted Living facilities to better represent this growing portion of long-term care in Delaware.

The initial bill was broad, requiring all staff "working with" dementia care residents to complete 12 hours of initial

dementia care training followed by continual training. This would have required any staff, even with tangential contact with dementia care residents, to receive this training.

The final bill, thanks to DHCFA advocacy, requires 4 hours of initial and 4 hours of annual training to direct care staff in secured memory units, with non-direct care staff receiving 2 hours of initial and 2 hours of annual training. Currently the requirement only applies to Assisted Living settings.

DHCFA worked with legislators on regulations related to temporary staffing agencies. HB204 w/HA1 + SA1 requires temporary staffing agencies that serve long-term care facilities to register annually with DHCQ, validate the qualifications of the staff provided, maintain records of the staff's credentials, job records, and required immunizations, and provide those records, on request, to the DHSS and the facility where the staff is placed. This bill, passed by the General Assembly on June 20, 2024, helps facilities ensure that temporary staff are meeting the same standard as regular staff. Previously, temporary staffing agencies providing health care staff only needed a business license to operate in Delaware.

Legislators introduced a bill that would have required all assisted living providers to have The Joint Commission accreditation, with memory care services holding The Joint Commission certification. DHCFA negotiated with the bill's sponsor to make accreditation voluntary and not limited to The Joint Commission. The association also encouraged members to apply for the AHCA/NCAL National Quality Award.

- **DHCFA worked to ensure that other bills, as originally written, were modified to be less restrictive or not brought to the floor for a vote.**
- **Annual Advocacy Day** brought administrators and LTC professionals to Dover to stress the need for LTC funding and support. DHCFA coupled this with a number of small advocacy opportunities throughout the legislative session, bringing small groups of DHCFA provider members to Legislative Hall on a rotating basis to meet with lawmakers.
- **Professional advocacy** along with grassroots campaigns helped stop unfunded and ambiguous legislation from advancing, providing time to rework proposed bills into reasonable, workable, and financially responsible form before moving forward in future legislative sessions.
- **Maintained a visible presence in Dover** during legislative sessions as well as regular contact and outreach with state legislators and the federal congressional delegation.

Strategic Partnerships: DHCFA worked with a breadth of organizations to advocate for the long-term care industry in the state. These included the Delaware Hospital Association, the Delaware Nurses Association, the Delaware Medical Society, and the Delaware Association for Home and Community Care trade associations; and the Delaware Health Resources Board, the Delaware Health Care Commission Sub-committee on Workforce Development, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency/Division of Public Health Preparedness Section, the Delaware Nursing Home Resident Quality Assurance Commission, the Long Stay Patients Workgroup, Cabinet officials, state agency personnel Delaware Healthcare-Associated Infections Advisory Committee, and Delaware Health Resources Board.

Voter Voice

The VoterVoice interface allows DHCFA to send advocacy appeals to supporters who then, in turn, can simply contact their legislators with key appeals. DHCFA sent out several appeals to generate contact with legislators on key issues in 2024.

Group Purchasing Organization

Late in 2024, DHCFA joined Incite Strategic Partners' group purchasing program, AHCA/NCAL's exclusive group purchasing partner. Incite offers DHCFA members who join the program the best rates on top quality senior living goods and services as well as the free Abenity employee perks program. Incite will work closely with members to serve their needs. VOYCE – a resident translation service is an offering available through Incite.

National Quality Award

Genesis Lofland Park Center received the AHCA/NCAL National Quality Gold Award, one of only two centers in the

nation to achieve this rating in 2024. DHCFA celebrated Senior Administrator (and DHCFA Board member) Tawyna Dennis and her team at the Annual Education Conference and Trade Show. The Lofland Park Team will be recognized nationally at the AHCA/NCAL Quality Summit in April.

Thanks to communication and education, Delaware saw the second highest growth nationally in Intend to Apply applications for 2025, a 200% increase. In November, DHCFA members received coaching on the Bronze Award application through a two-session workshop in conjunction with the Health Care Association of Michigan. Several centers completed the training.

Education

DHCFA is a certified CE provider for administrators and nurses and a certified sponsor with NAB and the Delaware Board of Nursing. In 2024, individual DHCFA members could earn up to 20 CEs across 12 different in-person and online programs.

DHCFA held two general in-person events in 2024, the Assisted Living Conference and the Education Conference and Trade Show.

- **The Annual Education Conference and Trade Show**, “Quarterbacking Your Needs for Touchdown Training,” in November was a great success, as we encouraged attendees and exhibitors to embrace the theme and wear their favorite team’s jerseys or swag! There were mostly Eagles fans, the Ravens were well represented, along with a few others. There was even a hockey sweater or two. The event saw 185 registered attendees, a 27% increase over 2023 and an 11% increase in sponsors and exhibitors. All six sessions and speakers received 4.5 or above stars out of 5 from attendees. **Mark your Calendar for November 6, 2025, again at Bally’s Casino Resort in Dover.**
- **Assisted Living Conference** in May also received high marks. DHCFA was honored to have LaShua Bethea, president of NCAL, on hand to discuss the national landscape for assisted living. Registered attendance was 22% higher than in 2023. **Mark your Calendar for May 14, 2025, location to be determined.**

DHCFA conducted a series of **webinars** on topics ranging from tuberculosis education to cybersecurity, creating inclusive communities for LGBTQ+ older adults, sepsis education, building consumer confidence in assisted living, and resident-to-resident aggression. The virtual sessions gave professionals easy access to continuing education.

DHCFA held three **LLAM Train-the-Instructor** classes for Assisted Living providers participating in the program, adding 24 new instructors in 2024. Each instructor earned 5 CEs from the Board of Nursing after completing the class.

Communication

Friday/Weekly Round Up Report: In August 2020, we instituted the Friday Roundup email to condense the amount of information DHCFA was circulating into one convenient document. Every Friday, we send a digest of news, guidance, teleconferences, offers from associate members, and more that will be of use to our members. This goes to administrators, DONs, and medical directors. In November, we moved the Friday Roundup to a Tuesday morning distribution, rebranding the communication as the Weekly Roundup. Research shows that early week is a much better time to disseminate information than a Friday afternoon.

Any urgent messages are sent during the week as needed. In this situation, the information is included in the Weekly Round Up to reinforce it.

Website: www.dhcfa.org

DHCFA started working on a revamped website more intuitive and useful for members and for the public. This includes a reorganization with a focus on member resources, a carefinder, and a careerfinder. Events will auto populate on the home page, as will all news. Sponsor logos will rotate at the bottom of every page offering annual sponsors a value-add. DHCFA will launch the new site early in 2025.