

Human Services: Learning and Support Network is Helping Long-Term Care Facilities During COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation today provided an update on the Educational Support and Clinical Coaching Program (ESCCP), a learning network established by DHS and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation in early April and supported by seven health systems around Pennsylvania that provides technical assistance and educational support to long-term care facilities in light of the current pandemic. The ESCCP hosts webinars and provides direct outreach and support to long-term care facilities including personal care homes and assisted living facilities.

“Long-term care providers serve vulnerable and medically fragile Pennsylvanians and play an important role in our health care system, and COVID-19 has created difficult situations for these necessary providers,” said Secretary Miller. “We need providers to know that they are not alone during this time, and the ESCCP allows DHS, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, and our health system partners across the commonwealth to maintain a network of support that can help these providers learn, respond, and prepare as the pandemic progresses.”

More than 45,000 Pennsylvanians live in more than 1,200 personal care homes and assisted living residences throughout the commonwealth, and these residents are some of the most vulnerable and susceptible to COVID-19. These facilities may not have access to the clinical staff that is more typical in nursing facilities, and as such direct care workers in these settings may be less prepared to deal with the challenges raised by COVID-19. To help support these facilities DHS, in partnership with health care systems and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, launched the ESCCP to help these facilities handle COVID-19 and related issues.

DHS’s Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) directly contacted personal care homes and assisted living facilities to conduct preliminary needs assessments. When needs are identified, they are referred to one of the partner health systems: Allegheny Health Network, Geisinger, Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, the Wright Center, or University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. This network can provide real-time support through telehealth networks.

These health systems have provided multiple supports to providers. For example, clinical coaching on how to prepare for and manage cases of COVID-19, guidance on infection control, using and accessing personal protective equipment, how to screen residents and staff for COVID-19, guidance and accessing testing kits, and how to implement guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH). The information collected by the health systems is then shared with PEMA and DOH about personal care home’s or assisted living residence’s needs, such as an urgent need for PPE or a new outbreak in a facility. The CDC and DOH have provided guidance in managing outbreaks in these vulnerable settings as needed.

Additionally, the ESCCP helps providers use their current experience for assessment of response, strategic planning, and policy development to inform future response to new outbreaks of COVID-19 or other pandemics.

The educational support component of this program includes webinars hosted by the Jewish Healthcare Foundation on important topics for personal care homes and assisted living residences. Webinars are held twice weekly. Topics include infection control best practices and proper use of personal protective equipment, among others. Thus far, more than 1,900 employees from assisted living facilities and personal care homes have participated in 14 webinars. More information on trainings and how to sign up can be found at <https://www.tomorrowshealthcare.org/>.

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.