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**To:** [DH, LTCRegs](#)  
**Subject:** [External] DOH Staffing Regulations  
**Date:** Wednesday, September 1, 2021 10:30:33 AM

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## **The Impact of Proposed Increase to Nursing Home Staffing Requirements**

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Recently, Governor Tom Wolf's Administration announced plans to require a significant increase in the staffing requirement for skilled nursing facilities across the state. While I applaud the Administration's commitment to improving the quality of care in skilled nursing facilities, the reality is that a 50% increase from 2.7 hours per day to 4.1 hours per day is not realistic due to the shortage of workers in the healthcare industry, the barriers to access appropriate educational programs needed for key positions, and the significant financial burden this increase in staffing will place on providers which, in turn, will be passed on to older adults and their families.

It is well documented that there is an overwhelming worker shortage across the country. Healthcare providers are significantly impacted by this and are competing for the same workforce that retail, distribution, manufacturing, and hospitality industries are also trying to attract with ever increasing hourly rates. In Pennsylvania, the average hourly wage for a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) is approximately \$17 per hour. The work done by a CNA is hard work physically, mentally, and emotionally, especially over the last 18 months. In today's environment, that same CNA could easily find work at a pay rate comparable to their \$17 for work that is substantially easier and less strenuous.

On the other hand, the work of caring for older adults is very fulfilling for many who have committed to this industry. I often hear caregivers say that they come to work every day because of the significant impact they can have on people's quality of life and the meaningful relationships they are able to build with residents. However, the financial needs of their families cause them to leave these positions for higher hourly pay rates in some of the industries aforementioned. Many providers, including Messiah Lifeways, are working to increase hourly rates even more, but competition remains high. Messiah Lifeways at Messiah Village, a continuing care retirement community in Cumberland County with a five star quality rating, has historically budgeted its nursing facility to staff near the 4.1 level. However, due to the staffing shortage in the industry even before the pandemic, we have not been able to reach our planned staffing levels despite offering very competitive wages and benefits.

The current system of producing healthcare workers is also insufficient to meet the demands of current staffing levels let alone the proposed higher requirements. The educational requirements for Certified Nursing Assistants, nurses, and other healthcare professionals limits the number of qualified candidates in the job market who are needed to meet the current demand in nursing homes. Long-term care organizations have been creative in their attempts to attract individuals who are new to senior care, but the educational system has its limitations when it comes to providing the training needed for CNAs, LPNs, and RNs. I believe that creating partnerships with educational

institutions is a critical piece in creating opportunities for new entries into the long-term care workforce, but the educational facilities are limited in their ability to get people through the required training to meet the current demands of long-term care. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has left many working in long-term care burned out and moving on to new industries and, in some cases, leaving healthcare as a whole. There simply are not enough new healthcare workers entering the field to replace those who are leaving let alone achieve the proposed higher staffing levels across the state.

Many long-term providers are organizations with slim financial margins who are attempting to provide the very best care while keeping the costs to older adults and their families reasonable. Skilled nursing care is not inexpensive with the majority of costs being staff related. Increasing the staffing requirement will, unfortunately, increase the costs to older adults and their families, making skilled nursing care less accessible to those who need it. Others may argue that long-term care providers receive funding from various government sources such as Medicaid and Medicare; however, that funding is insufficient to cover the current costs of care at the current required staffing levels. Our organization alone provides over \$3 million dollars of uncompensated care to individuals in skilled nursing annually.

I fear that should these staffing requirements be enacted for providers in Pennsylvania, there will be a significant reduction in services provided to older adults as many skilled nursing providers will not be able to meet the new staffing requirements. Those facilities that are able to meet the requirements will have to significantly increase their pricing for care which will directly impact those older adults and their families. This requirement should be reconsidered given the implications to the long-term care industry and the likely impact on Pennsylvania's older adults. I strongly suggest that the state focus on investing in current and future caregivers before implementing such a requirement.



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