

Action Checklist:

Improving the Pandemic Response to Better Support
the Home Health Aide Workforce and the People They Serve

What can the State Government do?

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Recognize that home health care and the home health aide workforce are an essential part of the health care system. Home health aides allow people with long-term needs to remain safely in their homes; they enable safe transitions to home health care for people recovering after a hospital stay; they relieve the burden on hospitals, nursing homes, and family, which is of particular importance during a pandemic

Ensure that the home health aide workforce is well-supported, financially secure, respected, and prepared so that aides can fulfill their critical role of caring for patients in their homes and home health care organizations can more easily retain this vital workforce

Initiate outreach and engage federal and local government to coordinate pandemic preparedness planning and to identify clear channels of responsibility and communication in both planning and execution of preparedness plans

Engage home health care and workforce leaders alongside hospital and nursing home stakeholders to inform the state pandemic response and ensure that home health aides are well represented in emergency preparedness plans

MAJOR ACTION ITEMS



Improve Access to and Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Provide clear and timely guidance to local entities and home health care organizations on preemptive, long-term stockpiling of PPE, including type, amount, and maintenance practices (e.g., monitoring expiration, restocking)
- Improve PPE coordination, ordering, and distribution processes; help county and city governments set up systems for distributing PPE to home health care organizations; establish bulk ordering system administered by home health care associations
- Reimburse or allocate resources to fund PPE and related costs incurred by home health care organizations
- Use data-informed strategies to identify and resolve PPE shortfalls. Provide clear and ongoing communication on best PPE safety practices, including the type and proper use of PPE
- Provide PPE or adequate funding for home health organizations to distribute supplies to patients to promote home health aide safety in patient homes



Promote Additional Patient and Worker Safety Practices

- Codify safety protocols and practices for patients, family, and other caregivers when home health aides are in the home to better enable organizations to protect aides' safety; make adherence to safety protocols a requirement for receiving services
 - Guide Managed Long Term Care (MLTC) Organizations and other contractors to communicate expectations regarding safety practices directly to patients, their families, and other caregivers in the home; require these practices as a condition of home health care service
 - Allow greater flexibility for home health care organizations to deviate from standard practice during a pandemic (e.g., allow organizations to suspend admitting patients with infectious diseases if they do not have adequate PPE or staff coverage)
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Improve Access to Vaccination and Testing and Adherence to Guidelines

- Coordinate with local and federal entities to establish industry standards and mandates (i.e., uniform expectations regarding testing and vaccination requirements across entities including home health care, nursing homes, and hospices)
 - Identify trusted messengers for diverse audiences and develop and disseminate clear, consistent, and culturally sensitive messaging to encourage compliance and comfort with vaccination and testing guidelines
 - Promote effective communication about vaccines and testing appropriate for multiple modalities (e.g., social media, town hall meeting, television, and radio public service announcements)
 - Build relationships with home health care organizations to develop an agreed upon vaccination and testing action plan
 - Facilitate access to onsite testing or testing supplies
 - Coordinate with national vaccine suppliers and local government to ensure that vaccines are readily available to home health care aides in accessible locations
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Improve Communication & Emotional Support

- Support the development and deployment of technologies that facilitate communication and promote emotional support of home health aides
 - Provide funds to support the emotional and mental health of home health aides and the supervisors who support them
 - Offer a state-wide emotional support hotline designed for home health aides
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Address Financial Instability & Access to Work Issues

- Develop mechanisms that allow home health care organizations to access targeted workforce funds directly through state programs and not just through MLTC organizations
- Make funds available to support organizations' ability to:
 - Provide safe and accessible public transportation alternatives
 - Provide hazard and overtime pay
 - Provide short-term housing alternative to reduce risk to families of aides
- As part of pandemic planning, prepare for rapid launch and implementation of regulatory waivers
 - Remote supervision
 - E-learning

- Allow the same flexibilities (waivers) that are afforded other entities (e.g., in New York State MLTC organizations and certified home health agencies were allowed to do virtual assessments to prepare for their care plans, while licensed agencies were not)
- Provide quality childcare or funds for childcare for essential workers and provide information about childcare options to home health care organizations
- Suspend or modify selected, non-critical Department of Health reporting requirements at the onset and height of emergencies and offer clearer communication on changes in regulations regarding what is permissible and what is not permissible (e.g., allowing MLTCs and Licensed agencies to work from the same nursing assessment to establish their care plans to reduce repetitive effort that increases exposure to both staff and patients)
- Work directly with local government, public transportation systems and private transportation services to ensure that home health aides have consistent access to low- cost or free transportation during public health emergencies to safely travel to and from patients' homes, including:
 - Funding reduced fares for essential workers or establishing non-fare time periods
 - Providing alternatives for health care aide transportation when safe public transportation is not available, such as subsidized use of private car services



Support Training, Recruitment & Retention of Workforce

- Update regulations to allow for flexibility in training mechanisms, including permitting e- learning and other virtual education opportunities
- Fund the development of home health aide training programs and participant stipends as compensation for training time to attract candidates and target funds specifically for education, training and pay enhancements
- Help drive economic stability by continuing to work towards instituting a livable base wage for home health aides, while advocating for changes to federal policy to insure that access to other needed benefits (e.g., health insurance) is not put at risk by higher hourly wages (e.g., New York State should implement the full recommendations of the Fair Pay for Home Care Act by insuring that home health aides are paid at least 150% of the local minimum wage)
- Direct Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) funds more effectively to home health care organizations that provide care to underserved communities and to Medicaid recipients