



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 13, 2020

Human Services Issues Personal Care Home and Assisted Living Guidance, Launches Training Program and Learning Network Amid COVID-19 Crisis

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) today issued guidance to DHS-licensed personal care homes and assisted living residences and is launching education support and clinical coaching with the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, the Wright Center, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Geisinger, and the Allegheny Health Network to help these facilities during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

“We know that this is an overwhelming time for our assisted living and personal care facilities and the vulnerable residents they serve, but we will do everything we can to support them during this crisis,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “We are issuing this guidance and establishing the Educational Support and Clinical Coaching Program (ESCCP) to ensure that residents and providers of personal care homes and assisted living residences remain safe as we work to limit the spread of COVID-19.”

More than 65,000 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. Certain [regulations and requirements](#) for personal care homes and assisted living facilities, which are licensed by DHS, are temporarily suspended and new procedures are in place in order to keep residents and facility staff safe during the COVID-19 public health crisis. These include:

- Dining and scheduled communal activities should be done in a way that adheres to social distancing recommendations;
- Visitation is restricted except for medically necessary personnel or in the case of end-of-life compassionate care; and,
- Regular health screenings for staff before they begin their shift.

Facilities should always be monitoring and adjusting infection control procedures as necessary to keep residents and staff safe in the event a resident shows symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19. All providers should prepare for potential staffing challenges and assess personal protective equipment supply and make additional orders as necessary.

These facilities may not have access to the clinical staff that is more typical of nursing facilities, and as such, direct care workers in these settings could be ill-equipped to deal with 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.

The educational support component of this program includes weekly webinars hosted by the Jewish Healthcare Foundation on important topics for personal care homes and assisted living residences. The first introductory webinar is available [here](#). Topics include infection control best practices and proper use of personal protective equipment, among others. More information on trainings and how to sign up can be found at <https://www.tomorrowshhealthcare.org/>.

DHS's Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) is also reaching out to personal care homes and assisted living facilities to conduct preliminary needs assessments. When needs are identified, they are referred to one of DHS's partner health systems: Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, the Wright Center, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Geisinger, and the Allegheny Health Network. These health systems will provide clinical coaching on how to prepare for and manage COVID-19 and provide guidance on infection control, personal protective equipment, how to screen residents and staff for COVID-19, and how to implement guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

These health systems will also be able to notify 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. DOH will provide their guidance in managing outbreaks in these vulnerable settings as needed.

DHS is also reminding personal care homes and assisted living facilities that they should also permit individuals who have been discharged from a hospital to return to their homes so they may comply with the stay-at-home orders issued by Governor Wolf. While this may be a frightening proposition for personal care homes and assisted living residences, with the establishment of the new ESCCP, DHS and its partners are supporting facilities and their residents through this difficult period.

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.

Guidance to DHS providers related to COVID-19 is available [here](#).