



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

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DIRECTOR

# **Michigan Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council**

## **Final Recommendations December 1, 2023**

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## Executive Summary

The Governor's Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council (the Council) was established with a clear mandate to review, develop, and recommend an array of policies, legislative changes, and administrative actions aimed at enhancing nursing home care quality. The council adhered to eight council goals, including the recruitment and retention of staff, workforce development, career progression, equitable wages and benefits, diversity, sustainability, transparency, and accountability within the industry. To facilitate its comprehensive recommendations, the council established three subgroups, each dedicated to addressing specific facets of workforce stabilization – quality, retention and recruitment, and wages and benefits. The report concludes by presenting actionable policy recommendations, spanning issues from staffing and compensation to creating support centers for direct care workers and bolstering recruitment and retention strategies. These recommendations are poised to drive meaningful change in Michigan's nursing home industry, improving the quality of care for residents and enhancing the well-being of the dedicated workforce.

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light long-standing deficiencies in our healthcare system and intensified the shortage of staff in Michigan's nursing home sector. Acknowledging the vital importance of sufficient staffing in long-term care facilities, the Michigan Nursing Homes COVID-19 Preparedness Task Force recognized staffing issues as a top priority for future attention. Building upon the task force's efforts, the Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council concentrated on developing policies and recommendations aimed at attracting skilled individuals and establishing a sustainable workforce within long-term care facilities. Michigan is committed to creating a robust long-term care system that safeguards nursing home residents, offers high-quality employment opportunities, and promotes equity.

The nursing home sector operates within a complex regulatory structure that involves oversight from various entities at both the state and federal levels. At the state level, several government departments are involved in regulating the nursing home industry. This includes oversight by the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), funding administration by the Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), workforce development information offered by the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (DLGE), and advocacy by the State Long Term Care Ombudsman.

## Purpose

The Michigan Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council was created by Governor Whitmer's [Executive Order No. 2021-15](#) as an advisory body in the Department of Health and Human Services to provide guidance and recommendations to ensure Michigan has the tools to support quality care and workforce stabilization in nursing homes across the state, focused on policies and recommendations aimed at attracting talent and building a sustainable workforce.

## Guiding Principles

Members of the Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council agreed on five guiding principles to maintain focus throughout the duration of this Council's work.

1. Recognizing the urgency of Nursing Home Workforce challenges, the Council will pursue both prompt actions that can be taken to alleviate the acute strains on the workforce, as well as long-term, sustainable solutions to address long-existing issues in the nursing home workforce.
2. Highlighted areas to address workforce stabilization:
  - a. Wages, Benefits, and Supports,
  - b. Professionalization of the workforce through competencies approach,
  - c. Career awareness, and
  - d. Development of career pathways to elevate the profession.
3. Staffing has been identified as the most prominent issue to tackle. The Council will consider evidence-based solutions provided by coalition partners and being utilized by other states to address similar workforce concerns.
4. The Council is building off the Michigan Nursing Homes COVID-19 Preparedness Task Force and in tandem with the Direct Care Workers Advisory Committee to focus on policies and recommendations aimed at building a sustainable workforce in long-term care facilities.
5. The Council is working to build a strong, resilient system of long-term care that improves the quality of life and protects nursing home residents, provides quality jobs to Michiganders, and advances racial and gender equity.

## Goals

Governor Gretchen Whitmer charged the Council with reviewing, developing, and recommending policies, administrative actions, legislative changes, and other approaches to support nursing home quality care. To guide the Council's recommendations, the following key objectives were rigorously adhered to:

1. **Elevate Staffing Levels Industry-Wide:** With a laser focus on both recruitment and retention, the Council strived to bolster the workforce across the nursing home sector.
2. **Champion Workforce Development and Stability:** The Council recognized the pivotal role of workforce development and sought to establish a foundation that ensures the long-term stability of this crucial sector.
3. **Foster Career Progression and Professionalization:** By creating clear career pathways, including credentialing, the Council aimed to enhance the professionalism of the workforce, fostering excellence in service provision.
4. **Eliminate Barriers to Entry and Retention:** The Council made it a priority to address the obstacles that deter individuals from entering and remaining in this field, thus ensuring a continuous supply of dedicated professionals.
5. **Prioritize Livable Wages and Benefits:** The Council advocated for jobs in nursing homes that not only offered fair, livable wages but also comprehensive benefits, recognizing the value and dedication of the workforce.

6. **Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Acknowledging the importance of diversity and inclusion, the Council actively worked to create an environment that values and welcomes individuals from all backgrounds.
7. **Ensure the Sustainability of Quality Care:** The Council's recommendations are underpinned by the enduring commitment to safeguard the sustainability of quality care, thereby preserving the well-being of residents and the integrity of the industry.
8. **Promote Transparency and Accountability:** The Council strived to uphold the principles of transparency and accountability within the industry, ensuring that standards are met, and stakeholders are informed.

These objectives have guided the Council's recommendations toward a future where nursing home care in Michigan is of the highest quality, accessible to all, and deeply committed to the welfare of both residents and workers.

## Council Membership

Member	Organization	Representing
<b>Farah Hanley</b>	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services	
<b>Valerie Jemerson</b>	Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity	
<b>Adam Sandoval</b>	Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs	
<b>Salli Pung</b>	Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman Program	Residents
<b>Alison Hirschel</b>	Michigan Elder Justice Initiative	Residents
<b>Dian Palmer</b>	SEIU	Workforce
<b>Mark Berger</b>	Villa Healthcare	Employers
<b>Nancy M. Hebert</b>	SEIU	Workforce
<b>Erica Holman</b>	Clinton Area Care Service	Employers (not-for-profit)
<b>Jannice L. Lamm</b>	Oakview MCF	Employers (county government)
<b>Mary McClendon</b>	SEIU	Workforce
<b>Michael Munter</b>	Symphony Care Network	Employers
<b>Martha M. Nichols</b>	SEIU	Workforce
<b>Robert L. Norcross</b>	Prestige Healthcare Management	Employers
<b>Jennifer Root</b>	SEIU	Workforce
<b>Terence Thomas</b>	Activate Detroit	Residents
<b>Yvonne M. White</b>	NAACP	Advocates

## Council Subgroups and Timeline

To address the pressing issue of nursing home workforce stabilization and maintain a sense of urgency, the Council opted to establish three subgroups. These subgroups simultaneously convened and focused on specific aspects critical to the overarching strategy for nursing home workforce stability. The subgroups were dedicated to quality

enhancement, retention and recruitment strategies, and wages and benefits improvements. The primary objective of these subgroups was to collectively devise the most effective policy and implementation recommendations. These recommendations underwent a thorough review and required endorsement by the Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council.

## Council Timeline

- **December 14, 2021:** Executive Order 2021-15 released.
- **February 23, 2022:** Appointments Received by DHHS.
- **June 2022:** First Council Meeting.
- **September – December 2022:** Presentations at Council meetings from agencies and experts. Survey from Council to general public to better understand workforce crisis.
- **January 2023:** Council formed subgroups focused on Quality, Retention & Recruitment, and Wages & Benefits.
- **February – July 2023:** Subgroups worked on recommendations and brought discussion items back to Council.
- **August – September 2023:** Subgroup recommendations reviewed and discussed by the Council.
- **October 2023:** Final recommendations reviewed and discussed by Council.
- **November 2023:** Final report approved by Council.

## Final Recommendations

As members of the Governor’s Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council, we were asked to make recommendations regarding staffing, pay, benefits, and quality. The Governor created this Council to address the nursing home staffing challenges that have a dramatic impact on nursing home residents and the existing staff who care for them. The staffing shortages have reached a crisis level across the entire continuum of care affecting the safety and quality of life of residents and staff alike and have resulted in an inability to meet state and federal requirements. While this is a nationwide challenge, we are pleased that the State of Michigan recognizes the current and future challenges and is proactively preparing to meet them.

## State Prioritization

The Governor should set expectations for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO), the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), and others as required to address the nursing home staffing crisis. MDHHS must be proactive and appoint an individual in a leadership position with sufficient staff support to devise and implement a comprehensive, detailed action plan in ongoing consultation with stakeholders including regulators, representatives of providers, representatives of front-line staff, representatives of families and residents, and advocates.

In developing the plan, we recommend MDHHS apply a racial justice and gender equity lens to analyzing the challenges facing nursing home workers and developing impactful solutions. We recommend taking the following steps and utilizing the strategies listed below:

- Identify best practices in Michigan and in other states across the continuum for workforce stabilization.
- Review data and studies related to the workforce to ensure the plan is evidence-based and responsive to identified challenges.
- Provide practical solutions to expanding the workforce and remove barriers/policies that hinder workforce growth.
- Consider utilizing a LEAN process or processes to address emerging issues.
- Create a coordinated plan in on-going consultation with stakeholders that addresses issues beyond training and credentialing and that includes specific goals, plans, benchmarks, and timelines.
- Obtain an immediate independent analysis of:
  - The current staffing levels and the gap between the status quo and the required staffing levels.
  - Budget and reimbursement implications of expanding staffing consistent with the mandate.
- Evaluate the 85% census requirements that are in tension with staffing ratios if this provision is retained in the new rate reimbursement methodology.
- Understand the impact of any staffing mandate that may be required by CMS pursuant to the proposed federal rule. Then identify possible strategies for providers who are unable to meet the staffing requirements and ensure the state has a proactive plan to protect residents and support providers.

### Creating a Direct Care Worker Support Center

Create a Direct Care Worker Support Center that is developed, staffed, and directed by individuals with direct care worker experience, and who reflect the demographics of Michigan's nursing home industry, to provide practical support and assistance to the direct care workforce. The support center could:

- Maximize knowledge of and access to existing social and human services, health care, legal services, public benefits, financial, educational, and other programs, and assistance that address issues of particular importance to direct care workers.

- Support development of additional counseling and other resources and services, including support for the emotional impact of sickness and death of residents.
- Provide information about job opportunities.
- Convene staff from MDHHS and other departments whose work has a direct impact on the challenges the direct care workforce face (e.g., housing, childcare, and transportation) to create coordinated responses and innovations regarding direct care workers' concerns.
- Offer peer to peer support to improve worker voice and respect.
- Access to legal services and employment protections.
- Promote training to support staff in preventing abuse offered by the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.

### Drive More People to Healthcare and Remove Barriers

- Successfully utilize programs Nursing Homes are participating in today:
  - Career Pathway Development - Articulating a defined career pathway for individuals to progress to higher skilled, higher paying occupations is an effective workforce development strategy. This pathway would include providing information on cost, training length of time, credentials earned and career advancement opportunities for each occupational level. A successful career pathway program will require collaboration with employers, K-12 education, college educators, Michigan Works! agencies, and community-based organizations. An important component is providing dedicated career navigators in each prosperity region of the state to work with individuals pursuing a healthcare career in Michigan's nursing home industry.
  - Participant Supportive Services - Providing supportive services available through the Michigan Works! agencies to ensure successful completion of training and employment retention. Supportive services are based on individual needs and could include transportation, childcare, work clothing, and work-related equipment/tools. Through the Barrier Removal and Employment Success program, the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, Workforce Development (LEO-WD) provides additional funding to support the employment and reemployment of at-risk individuals and the removal of barriers to employment for low-income, poor, and working poor citizens of Michigan.
  - Registered Apprenticeships - Registered apprenticeships through the United State Department of Labor (USDOL) is a proven method to attract and retain qualified workers. Each Michigan Works! Agency has an



Apprenticeship Success Coordinator who will work with employers to establish a registered apprenticeship. Examples of funding that may be available through to reduce employer costs include on-the-job training funding for employers, reimbursement of a percentage of apprenticeship wages, and classroom training. Many employers, including MediLodge Rehabilitation & Wellness Centers, are taking advantage of registered apprenticeships.

- Nursing Home Industry Employer-Led Collaborative (ELC) - ELCs have been validated across the country and in Michigan as a best practice to address critical workforce needs. This process is led by employers and formalizes connections between employers, education and training institutions, workforce development organizations, and other applicable partners, such as economic development organizations, labor unions, and community-based organizations to develop solutions to fill critical occupations. The ELC works collaboratively to attract, develop, and retain qualified talent through communications, outreach, career fairs, mentorships, job shadow, internships, summer youth employment and other techniques. Staffing support is needed to support, manage, and coordinate ELC activities.
- Additional ways to remove barriers and bring more people into the workforce:
  - Support full time positions with paid leave time.
  - Address mandatory overtime in non-emergency situations.
  - Support the creation of Medication Aides with appropriate safeguards to allow nurses to have more time at the bedside assessing and treating residents.
  - Develop a healthcare curriculum for high school students:
    - Focus on 12th grade students who can become credentialed and may be able to do their clinicals so they can hit the ground running.
    - Help to manage the timeline of high school training, testing, and clinical experience.
    - Offer dual enrollment with community colleges to allow high school students to earn credits toward their high school diploma at the same time they complete the training requirements for certification.
    - Enable vocational programs in high schools to become nurse aide training sites.

- Consider supporting the Health Care Association of Michigan Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Investment Program and, a longer-term solution that will attract more people to the profession and the Health Care Career Advancement Program to promote quality care through labor management workforce development.
- Provide state-supported tuition benefits and loan forgiveness programs to assist individuals seeking to work in nursing homes with the costs of higher education.
- Leverage the Governor's influence to create discounts similar to military discounts for Direct Care Workers or providing credit, vouchers, or other benefits for common challenges like childcare and transportation.
- Provide culturally appropriate, person-centered personal care items for each nursing home resident.
- Eliminate situations that result in staff buying supplies with personal money like soaps, lotions, towels, briefs, linens, shampoo, etc. for residents.

### Competitive Livable Wages and Benefits

The Governor should convene a stakeholder process to define an appropriate living wage to compete with entry level positions in other sectors and support a multi-year commitment for wage pass through. Additionally:

- Maximize state investment in improving healthcare and other benefits to members of the direct care workforce to support sustainable work life balance including the development of affordable quality health insurance coverage and retirement benefits designed to meet the needs of this workforce.
- Consider how employee incentive programs are treated in the rate reimbursement methodology.

### Recruitment & Retention

Payment and acknowledgment for practices that promote effective recruitment, retention, and support:

- Reward creative strategies to compensate experienced CNAs who recruit, on-board, or mentor new staff.
- Support nursing homes that develop programs to improve mentoring, onboarding, and staff support.
- Include in the quality component of the new rate model recognition of providers who meet workforce related performance metrics on retention and staffing and engage in best practices including:

- Utilizing residents in the hiring/orientation process, training, and staff evaluation.
  - Creating a culture that encourages a favorable working and living environment and leads to staff longevity.
  - Creating flexible work schedules and other strategies to support consistent assignment.
  - Minimal or reduced usage of agency staff.
  - Provide training and equipment to reduce injury.
  - Enhancing existing or developing and implementing new culture change models.
- Create incentive for labor management partnerships jointly developed and implemented by nursing facility leadership and staff that would enhance current skills and creates opportunities for career ladders, prioritizing projects that could be implemented across multiple facilities, operators, and regions of the state.