Long Term Care Taskforce – August 18, 2020

Speakers:

✓ Dave Voepel, CEO of AZ Health Care Association
✓ Dana Kennedy, AZ Director of AARP
✓ Representative Jennifer Longdon, LD24
✓ Becky Hill, whose mother has been living in Long Term Care (LTC) for 10 years

Background from the Governor’s Office of Youth, Faith and Family Task Force on Long Term Care website. https://goyff.az.gov/councils-commissions/task-force-long-term-care:

Visitation at long-term care facilities has been limited to help protect residents from potential exposure to COVID-19. Arizona knows that contact with loved-ones is important to the residents and family members in Arizona. As such, Governor Ducey established the Task Force on Long Term Care to develop recommendations and benchmarks for the gradual re-opening of visitation and to ensure proper protocols are put into place. Members of the task force include operators of a variety of facility types, family members, advocates, and government officials.

The Task Force has been established to complete the following:

- Make recommendations about how and when in-person visitation can safely resume at long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, and ICFs.
- Make recommendations on how best to keep families informed about their loved ones in long-term care facilities and assisted living facilities.

Discussion

After the 2019 Hacienda Healthcare Facility incident (in which a disabled woman was repeatedly raped by a caregiver and gave birth) the Governor appointed an adhoc committee chair to address Long Term Care (LTC) facility issues. Last year’s meetings resulted in ten initiatives, six of which turned into legislation. Two of the six bills made it out of the initiating body and moved to the other body, before the legislative session was cut short by COVID-19.
This year’s discussions are focused on resuming visitation to LTC’s after the COVID-19 shut down. This group, with representatives from our state legislative branches, AARP, LTC facility representatives and family members of LTC residents, is drafting a plan. Considerations for “companionate care visitation” should include a negative COVID-19 test result less than 48 hours old and a signed attestation from the visitor. Resident cohorts and designated visitation rooms are an option. Medical guidance, contamination metrics and mitigation are being discussed. There was a recognition that one policy would not fit all LTC situations. The committee meets again later today (August 18) to complete the “gating criteria” plan draft and give the committee members two weeks to read and digest.

LTC family members were firm that they should be part of this discussion and that these facilities need to start reopening now. It’s been 23 weeks since they have seen their loved ones and they are ready to be reunited. They stated that family members are no more of an infection risk than an LTC staffer that leaves the facility at the end of the day. Family members play an essential role in physical, mental and emotional care. Family enhances communication, especially if the resident is hard of hearing or deaf. Family also humanizes the resident to the LTC staff and provide an extra set of eyes and ears, ensuring the best treatment for their loved one.

We did hear stories about neglect in the LTC’s. Resident complaints to the Attorney General or the police result in a conversation between the responding agency and the LTC facility – with no contact with the resident. Dollars to support further investigations is just not available.

We again heard about LTC facility staffing shortages and PPE shortages. Training on infection control is essential. The LTC workers need to feel valued and have everything they need to do their job. Consistent testing and a stockpile of PPE is necessary. Our state government has not budgeted monies for epidemic response in years. This issue will be taken up in the next session.

Lastly, there was a concern about the logistics of resident voting. Representative Longdon will look into drop boxes or other solutions.

UPDATE: On August 26, 2020 KJZZ published this article about the Task Force on Long Term Care: Arizona Families Will soon Be Allowed Back
Inside Long-Term Care Facilities. https://kjzz.org/content/1612810/arizona-families-will-soon-be-allowed-back-inside-long-term-care-facilities