The meeting had no formal agenda but was held as an open forum discussion between participants.

Legislative representatives in attendance were introduced – Senators Heather Carter, Lela Alston, and Andre Dallessandro; Representatives Jennifer Jermaine, Jay Lawrence, Jennifer Pawlik and Rosanna Gabaldon.

The conversation began with Dave Voepel, executive director of the Arizona Health Care Association, a professional association of skilled nursing facilities, assisted living centers, and businesses representing the long-term care profession. Dave addressed the rise in numbers of COVID-19 cases. Concern is over the capacity of the hospitals and how they will continue to handle the increase. He mentioned they believe they have a better handle now on how to deal with COVID-19 in skilled homes. The supply chain of PPE has improved, but still seems to be critical in the assisted living facilities. Round 2 of testing for staff is beginning. Skilled nursing staff will begin getting tested again and then assisted living will be addressed. A plan is needed to continue testing once the facilities re-open to outside visitors. Senator Carter asked if any of the partners present were having trouble getting PPE and to send their concerns to her so it can be addressed.

Dave also mentioned there are patients who have been discharged from the hospitals but still need 24 hour care, need a place to go. Data is being gathered as to where there are open beds that people can be transferred to once they have been discharged from hospital care, whether it be a skilled care facility or a rehab center.

Rep. Jennifer Jermaine responded to the question raised as to what is happening in rural communities. She indicated they are moving to have more of a respite care facility used, like hotels being converted to provide such facilities. This is outside of a skilled health facility.

Long-term care outside of skilled nursing/rehab facilities, basically home care staff will need to be tested on a weekly basis but are not sure who will cover the cost. Right now it is assumed that the agency will be responsible to cover the cost for testing for their staff members. The question was raised as to whether the blitz testing would continue with Round 2. No one was sure of an answer.

A concern was raised that some of the agencies that deal with aging (direct care workers in the home) aren’t able to get the free testing because they aren’t considered a health care provider. This is also affecting agencies who provide ride services for elderly. PPE and disinfectant is also an issue with these types of agencies. Senator Carter wanted this to be noted as an action item so it can be addressed at the appropriate level. She asked people to send the types of agencies and/or aging population providers to her.

Senator Carter asked if anyone was seeing and work force issues, particularly
  a. People being tested and test positive
  b. People leaving this type of work force to protect their own safety

Dave Voepel reported that people are concerned about working in long-term facilities. Haven Health in Scottsdale reported that they have some people leaving, but very limited. They are planning on providing training to grow their own staff in CNA’s. It’s always a problem getting
qualified staff for long-term care facilities because of the risks and the ability to provide a competitive wage considering the risk.

A follow-up question on whether direct care employees are being asked to take precautions outside of the workplace to keep them safe for themselves and also for the people they come in contact with at work. The providers present indicated that they have given their employees suggested guidelines.

Senator Carter asked if the same spike in increase is occurring in the workplace. An increase hasn’t been seen from those who were present at the meeting. Certain restrictions have been applied to the workforce like not traveling outside of the US.

Jay Lawrence was surprised that there weren’t procedures in place to move infected people from the group homes or long term care facilities to an isolated place, like St. Luke’s. Rep. Jennifer Jermaine indicated that since these facilities haven’t been licensed/certified, payment from Medicare and insurances would not cover the costs incurred once the person was moved to such a facility.

It was suggested that more discussion needs to take place on a strategic, long term plan for dealing with the virus in 2021-22. The virus isn’t going away and it will be a while before an effective vaccine is in place. The Legislative representatives present were urged to make sure this was happening, or going to be happening very soon!

Kyle Sawyer from AHCCCS said they continue to monitor what is happening with agencies that deal with the aging. They have not seen an increase in applications for AHCCS coverage, but have seen an increase in existing members staying on with AHCCS. Go to the AHCCS web page to get answers to a variety of questions (https://www.azahcccs.gov/).

There will be no meeting in July. The next meeting will most likely be in late August.