

Time is right to build a national model for senior care right here in Pennsylvania

By Garry Pezzano

PA - As the new governor and new state Legislature take the reins on their first budget, there is a sense of anticipation of what their leadership will bring to the commonwealth. While the Shapiro administration and General Assembly have developed their priorities, we urge them to seize this opportunity to build a national model for senior care right here in Pennsylvania that can help providers evolve to meet the needs of one of the nation's largest senior populations.

Last year represented a good start toward this goal. After virtually flat-funding Medical Assistance for nursing homes for more than a decade, Pennsylvania increased funding by 17.5% to begin addressing funding disparities and help providers meet new staffing mandates. Despite the increase, Pennsylvania's mission-driven nursing homes continue to suffer a workforce and funding crisis that has forced a majority of homes surveyed to turn away residents in need of post-acute care (https://www.leadingagepa.org/docs/default-source/communications/2023-member-survey-report---final.pdf?sfvrsn=3e93889a_7).

This simply cannot happen in a state where seven out of every 10 nursing home residents rely solely on Medicaid funding. Nursing homes certainly don't expect a repeat of last year's historic investment, but a reasonable 5% Medicaid increase must be part of the 23-24 state budget to help providers meet higher staffing mandates and keep up with the rising costs of care.

Nearly 100% of survey respondents indicated they've raised starting wages since last year's Medicaid funding increase was announced, but they're still having trouble hiring workers. In fact, over 55% reported turning away hospital admissions because of a lack of sufficient workforce and funding. We cannot continue to turn away Pennsylvanians who need our services.

More beds will be taken offline if we don't start addressing this situation head on. The commonwealth must continue to recognize the ongoing, crippling financial pressures that long-term care providers face by increasing Medicaid funding to help nursing homes hire more workers and keep up with inflation. Many nursing homes are still suffering from the fallout of the pandemic, coupled with record-high inflation that has led to costs reaching an all-time high. If we fail to do this, high-quality nursing homes will continue to turn down hospital admissions and the number of empty beds will only increase, leaving many Pennsylvanians without the care they need.

Another change that would further improve nursing home staffing is included in Senate Bill 668, introduced by Sens. Judy Ward and Maria Collett, which would help establish stronger c□

Other parts of the aging services ecosystem also need support to ensure older Pennsylvanians have access to the care and support they need regardless of their age or stage in life. One example is the Living Independence for the Elderly program, or LIFE, also known nationally as PACE. This critical part of the continuum offers a coordinated care system that helps seniors live independently in their homes and communities. Additional investment is needed for LIFE to keep pace with rising health care costs and chronic funding instability and to create greater parity with other programs and funding models. A 5% increase in the 23-34 state budget will ensure that LIFE remains a viable option for older adults needing and wanting services in their own homes and communities.

In addition, Medicaid funding needs to be extended to assisted living to provide much-needed relief for both providers and seniors struggling to fit their needs within the current system. Right now, too many of our seniors are denied access to this level of care purely because of financial constraints rather than their care needs. We also want to support Pennsylvanians who still have the capacity to live on their own by continuing to fund the Pennsylvania Housing Tax Credit Program to address the shortage of affordable rental housing for low-income seniors.

There isn't any doubt in my mind: The Shapiro administration, General Assembly and aging services providers all want the same thing – the best care for Pennsylvania seniors. With one of the oldest populations in the nation, it's critical that Pennsylvania takes action to address workforce challenges, historic underfunding and barriers to quality care.

Senior care providers look forward to working with the Shapiro administration and state lawmakers on the critical mission of providing high-quality care and support for Pennsylvania's growing senior population. There is a tremendous opportunity to help all aging services providers and their employees build a comprehensive senior care system that will be the envy of the rest of the country. What a legacy that would be.

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LeadingAge PA Member Survey

NURSING HOME BED CAPACITY AND WORKFORCE CHALLENGES



FAKE IS REAL
FENTANYL AWARENESS

FAKE PILLS KILL.

Fake Is Real is a fentanyl awareness campaign whose mission is providing straightforward, fact-based information that reduces harm from fentanyl-laced drugs and counterfeit prescription pills. We do it by giving users the information necessary to survive and save a life.

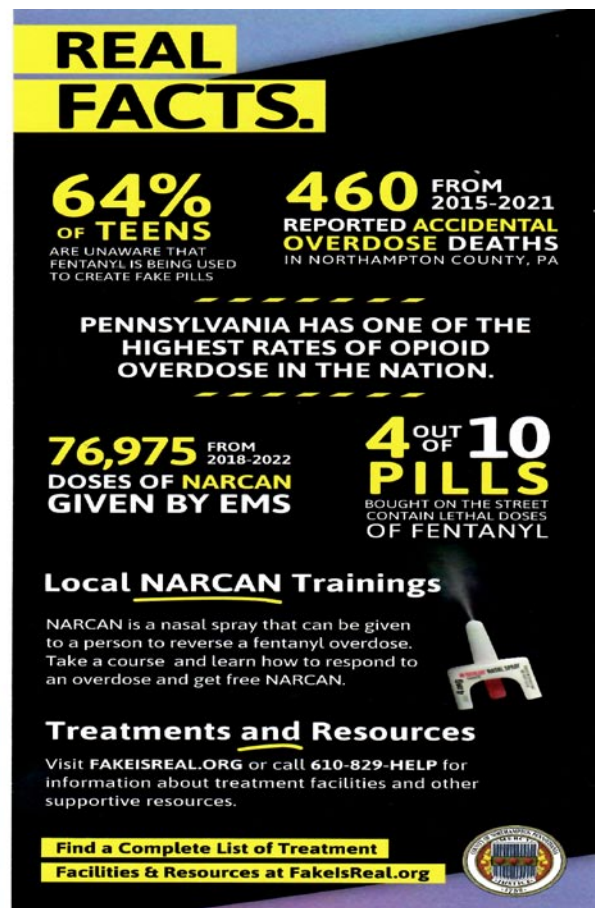
LEARN THE SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE
ANYONE CAN SAVE A LIFE. BE PREPARED TO ACT IN THE EVENT OF A FENTANYL OVERDOSE OR POISONING

STOP THE STIGMA
84% OF GEN Z (ERS) SAY THAT COPING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY IS A REASON THEY TURN TO PILLS

Real Help Against Fake Pills.

FAKEISREAL.ORG

f @fakeisrealLV



REAL FACTS.

64% OF TEENS ARE UNAWARE THAT FENTANYL IS BEING USED TO CREATE FAKE PILLS

460 FROM 2015-2021 REPORTED ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE DEATHS IN NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PA

PENNSYLVANIA HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST RATES OF OPIOID OVERDOSE IN THE NATION.

76,975 FROM 2018-2022 DOSES OF NARCAN GIVEN BY EMS

4 OUT OF 10 PILLS BOUGHT ON THE STREET CONTAIN LETHAL DOSES OF FENTANYL

Local NARCAN Trainings

NARCAN is a nasal spray that can be given to a person to reverse a fentanyl overdose. Take a course and learn how to respond to an overdose and get free NARCAN.

Treatments and Resources

Visit **FAKEISREAL.ORG** or call **610-829-HELP** for information about treatment facilities and other supportive resources.

Find a Complete List of Treatment Facilities & Resources at FakeIsReal.org