

## What Are Your Lessons Learned from the Past Two Years?

Dear Members,

As we have persevered and adjusted through different phases of the pandemic, the time to reflect on the big picture of the past two years and document lessons learned in assisted living has been elusive. At Mass-ALA, we have been making time to do that this spring. Before I preview some of our thoughts, I'd like to ask you: What are your lessons learned in the past two years that should be documented by Mass-ALA as the voice of assisted living? Please [email](#) me with your thoughts.

As I've had discussions with industry leaders, assisted living staff, and policy makers, we have agreed that it would be helpful to share what we've learned in the pandemic with policy makers and the public. We are closely listening to you and other members to hear what needs to be shared. Here is a preview of our current thinking as we begin to share the story of assisted living providers during the pandemic.

In March 2020, Mass-ALA's Board and staff recognized that there were three time-sensitive needs: 1. To provide frequent updates to assisted living staff with the latest information and guidance on COVID-19, 2. To advocate for the resources that residents and staff would need to provide the safest and healthiest possible environment, and 3. To advocate for policies that would adjust to staffing challenges and positively reinforce state and federal visitation and infection control guidance.

This led to the frequent Mass-ALA updates on emerging guidance and information, sent directly to members and archived on our [COVID-19 Updates and Resources](#) page, as well as successfully advocating for staffing, training, and health services flexibilities, which were issued 4/2/20. The state also put in place policies that helped providers respond to the pandemic, such as onsite National Guard COVID-19 testing and outdoor visitation options, as we continued to learn more and adapt in spring 2020.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, providers stepped up to put policies in place that were sensitive to striking a balance between facilitating the group activities and communal dining that are so important to the socialization and health and wellness in assisted living, and to enhancing infection control policies and caring for residents.

Mass-ALA advocated for adjustments to reopening policies throughout the past two years and worked closely with EOEA to help communicate appropriate guidance as the science advanced and vaccines were introduced. We also had important successes in legislative advocacy as policy makers recognized the need to have some flexibilities in assisted living that were not being in place prior to the pandemic. This included legislation that was adopted in June 2021 extending the health services, staffing and training flexibilities, and legislation adopted in February providing another extension. COVID-19 liability protection for providers was also passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor in 2020 and 2022.

We learned some lessons on assisted living policy in the pandemic that should lead to permanent changes to assisted living. There are two policy areas we are prioritizing, where changes are needed to the laws governing assisted living, which would require legislative action.

The first is that residents and families [benefited](#) from the health services nurses were allowed to provide on a temporary basis, and this should be made permanent by passing the Common Sense Health Services [bill](#). The second is that assisted living providers need to be able to ensure that residents who

are infectious be quarantined and/or cohorted with other infectious residents to allow the best practices of infection control and single-stream staffing. This was prevented these past two years by the application of landlord/tenant law to many areas of assisted living where it should not apply. Passing the [bill](#), An Act Clarifying the Classification of Assisted Living Residences, would ensure that EOE is empowered to put policies in place that would enable best-care practices to be followed without being constrained by the application of landlord/tenant law to many areas of assisted living policy.

What do you think should be included in our lessons learned and policy changes needed? Please [email](#) me with your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Brian Doherty, CAE

President & CEO