Assisted Living Advisory Council (ALAC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 14th, 2021
10:00 am
\*The meeting was held virtually via Zoom\*

ALAC members: Brian Danaher, Mary Jo Boynton, Kim Martone, and Matt Salmon.
EOEA staff: Secretary Elizabeth Chen, Assistant Secretary Carole Malone, Matt Casey, Siobhan Coyle, Trisha Marchetti, and William A. Travascio.

1. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 am by Secretary Chen.
2. Welcome and Introductions:

Secretary Chen thanked members of the Council, stakeholders, and members of the public for attending.
3. Approval of the Minutes:

The minutes from the September 21st, 2021 meeting were presented and approved by all those present with Mary Jo Boynton abstaining.
4. EOEA Updates:

Secretary Chen noted that two weeks ago EOEA in partnership with DPH held a webinar for ALR Executive Directors. There were over 500 attendees. During the webinar several topics were discussed, including the importance of scheduling booster clinics for residents and staff, infection protection protocols, and monoclonal antibodies. The best defense against COVID is that residents and staff obtain boosters as soon as they become eligible. In addition, masks should be worn and there should be frequent use of hand sanitizer. Multiple ALRs have needed the assistance of DPH rapid response teams, this was the result of gaps in infection control measures in those residences.

The Secretary thanked the work of ALR staff during the pandemic thus far, she noted that with the Omicron variant spreading now is the time to redouble our efforts to ensure ALRs remain safe havens. ALR managers should be prepared to double their care staff if there is an outbreak, so as to avoid cross infections.

Trisha Marchetti, Director of Assisted Living Certification – EOEA, mentioned that the certification team has been conducting site visits since March, 2021. The team recently welcomed a new staff person, Tom Thompson, in October. EOEA will soon be posting another job opening as Alexandra Newcomb departed last month. The agency is exploring ways to reduce the certification backlog that existed prior to March, 2020. Most of the Assisted Living Residences that have not had a site visit are working under a “Deemed Certified” status. Trisha added that her team has also been collecting Annual Aggregate Data from the network. This year EOEA’s new Director of Data Insights and Program Evaluation is working with the ALR team to streamline the collection of this data, this process will start March 1st. The new system will be piloted in the next week.

A survey was sent out to the network on November 24th that asked ALRs to report the vaccine booster status of their residents. Also, ALRs were asked to attest that they completed an audit of their infection control systems. Responses are due by tomorrow – Wednesday, December 15th, 2021.

Finally, after a DPH response team is deployed to a residence EOEA will communicate to the operators of the ALR a reminder of the purpose and limitations of that response team. The DPH rapid response team is meant to assist the residence through a difficult time. It is not meant to be punitive measure, or a staffing surge.

Matt Casey, General Counsel – EOEA, there was a hearing held on November 8th in response to the emergency regulations that were filed in September. No changes were made to the emergency regulations as a result of the comments that were received. A notice of compliance was filed on November 26th and the emergency regulations are now permeant.
5. Industry Updates:

Brian Danaher thanked EOEA for their active role in helping the industry during COVID and DPH for the Rapid Response Teams. He noted the Benchmark will send the completed survey to Trisha’s team by tomorrow’s deadline. He added that the emergency health services in ALRs have been helpful and hoped they would be extended.

Matt Salmon noted that hiring staff has been difficult during the pandemic. Booster clinics have gone well in his company’s residences. The uptake percentage among residents has been in the high 90s. There has not been much demand among staff, however.

Elissa Sherman, President of LeadingAge MA, the recent webinar was well received by her members. The top challenge for her members has been staffing, but the ALR industry is not alone in this.

Brian Doherty, President & CEO of Mass-ALA, hoped that more community providers will be providing monoclonal therapy in case there is increased demand. He hoped that ALR staff would also be eligible for the bonuses are that are being given to frontline medical staff from the ARPA money that was approved by the legislature. He felt it would be great positive reinforcement.

The Secretary mentioned that the first few modules of the Home Care Aide Training (PHCAST) are available online. Soon it will be available in Spanish and Haitian Creole. It is available free of charge. After the first two modules, the rest will need to be completed onsite in a clinical setting under the supervision of a nurse. Some who has completed the training would be sufficient to work in an ALR, since CNAs are not required.

Secretary Chen thanked Brian and Elissa for their updates. She noted that LeadingAge and Mass-ALA are valued partners.
6. Updates from Consumer Members:

Mary Jo Boynton and Kim Martone noted that they have visited ALRs multiple times throughout the pandemic. They have both been impressed by the thoroughness of staff.

The Secretary noted that ALR staff has access to the state supply of antigen tests, they are available and being sent out as requested.
7. Comments from Visitors:

None.
8. Other items for discussion:

None.
9. Adjournment:

Before adjourning the meeting the Secretary that this is a tough time for everyone as we try to live with the virus. 1/3 residents are over the age of 90, it is important that safe opportunities be created for them to engage in life. Social isolation on this population has taken a toll on them mentally and physically. The Secretary encouraged that ALR staff be vaccinated as soon as they are eligible because the lives of the residents are in their hands.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 am. The next meeting will be held Tuesday, March 22nd, 2022 at 10:00 am.