Assisted Living Advisory Council (ALAC) Meeting Minutes
September 22nd, 2020
10:00 am
\*The meeting was held virtually via WebEx\*

ALAC members: Mary Jo Boynton, Brian Danaher, Steven Ellsweig, Kim Martone, and May Shields.
EOEA staff: Matt Casey (chairing the meeting on Secretary Chen’s behalf), Siobhan Coyle, Trisha Marchetti, Mark Miller, and William A. Travascio

1. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 am by Matt Casey, EOEA’s General Counsel, who will be chairing the meeting on Secretary Chen’s behalf.
2. Welcome and Introductions
3. EOEA Updates:

Trisha Marchetti, Director of Assisted Living Certification – EOEA, spoke about guidance that EOEA sent out the day before and will be active as of Friday, September 25th. It replaces memorandum that was sent out on July 20th. The new guidance is focused mainly on indoor visitation and allows the ALR to identify spaces for indoor visitation. ALRs are asked to continue to take the temperatures of visitors and check them COVID like symptoms. The number of visits per day is at the discretion of the ALR based on the number of visitors, the number of staff available, and the amount of space available. Designated social visitation space needs to be by the entrance and limit the impact on residents within the ALR. The space will also need to be large enough to allow residents and visitors to socially distance and will need to be cleaned on a regular schedule.

The guidance stipulates that maintenance crews can come into the ALR pending there has not been a positive test by a resident or staff within the last 14 days. They will not be allowed into occupied units and they have to have their temperature checked when they arrive. The ALR also needs to take their contact information upon arrival. The maintenance crews must wear a face mask and any other protective equipment necessary.

The guidance will be circulated to ALAC members after today’s meeting, the guidance has also been posted on DPH’s website.

Mark Miller, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Program Integrity – EOEA, noted that during the week of Labor Day ALR executive directors would have received a memorandum from Secretary Chen that ALR staff would be required to take an LGBTQ+ training. The training is statutorily mandated for all those who are certified by or contract with EOEA. This training was developed in partnership with Lisa Krinsky at the Fenway Institute. The training takes about 45 minutes to 1 hour, it uses scenarios and historical information, and will be available online only. The mandate from the legislature was unfunded, therefore EOEA partnered with the Office of Long-Term Services and Supports (OLTSS) to make it available on a system hosted by Optum. In the future if an organization or provider has their own learning management system (LMS) they may be able to host it. ALR employees are not required to take it at the moment because it is being rolled out gradually to the aging network due to bandwidth limitations. Exceptions will be allowed for providers that meet the core curriculum.
4. Industry Updates:

Brian Danaher noted that recently Benchmark did a survey of the 30 residences in the state that they operate. He was happy to report that; 15 are providing oxygen management to residents, 11 are doing non-sterile dressing application (basic wound care), and 12 are providing various kinds of injections including insulin injections. He thanked EOEA for giving ALRs additional flexibility during the pandemic, allowing them to provide some skilled services using their own nursing staff.

Brian went on to note that recently EOHHS recommended that staff at nursing homes and rest homes be tested for COVID, EOHHS recommended that ALRs also test their staff as well. Nursing homes and rest homes can receive funding for testing from Medicare, however there is no such funding source for ALRs even though it is recommended. Benchmark has taken the steps to roll out testing in their residences, however he believed that EOEA should try to find funding sources to allow testing for all ALR staff.

With respect to the recent ALR hearing on September 16th, Brian asked that there be some consideration to remove the portion in the proposed regulations that would allow a staff member to opt out of being vaccinated for no reason at all. He agreed that the religious exemption and the exemptions for medical reasons should remain. Benchmark requires its’ staff to be vaccinated.

Steven Ellsweig felt that vaccinations are critical to the health and well being of staff and residents. He thought that they should be required because of that. He added that pre-employment physicals are also important, this was a policy he enacted when he was the Executive Director of Cadbury Commons.

Matt Casey said that the agency is reviewing comments it received before, during, and after the September 16th hearing. Those comments will inform if any changes are made before the emergency regs expire at the beginning of November. He pointed out that the regulations that were just put in place are similar to those put in place by DPH for SNFs.

Brian Doherty, Mass-ALA, thanked the administration for striking the right balance between safety and interaction when it released the most recent guidance for ALRs. He echoed Brian Danaher’s comments that funding should be made available to provide testing at ALRs. Not all ALR operators would be able to afford it otherwise.
5. Other items for discussion:

None.
6. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 10:42 am. Bill Travascio will be reaching out to members about rescheduling the December 22nd meeting up to earlier in the month. After this meeting it was determined that the next meeting will be on Monday, December 14th at 10:30 am.