

Long Term Care Pandemic Recovery:

A Long Road to Provider Sustainability



The COVID-19 pandemic has had long lasting and far reaching effects on Maine’s long term care facilities. Despite trends in a positive direction, no one could have predicted the scope and duration of this public health emergency that has left long term care providers on a long road to recovery. While managing COVID-19, providers are hoping and planning for how they can emerge from the most challenging two years in the history of the profession. In the wake of multiple facility closures, it is clear that there are some common challenges that must be overcome in order for facilities to be sustainable.

MHCA survey highlights continued workforce crisis:

The Maine Health Care Association (MHCA) surveyed its 200 members and received 145 concerning responses showing the ongoing staffing crisis in long term care.



Staffing positions open on average:	
1-5	26%
6-10	23%
11-15	19%
16-20	13%
21+	19%

Health care job loss during the pandemic:

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), nursing homes nationwide have lost 238,000 care-givers since the beginning of the pandemic. BLS data also shows, as of January 2022, overall long term care workforce levels are the lowest they have been in 15 years. While the labor shortage exists in many health care settings, the long term care sector

has been especially hard hit by the pandemic. For instance, hospitals have lost 2% of their workforce, compared to a 15% workforce decline among nursing homes and a 7% decline among assisted living communities nationwide. MHCA estimates a 10% workforce decline among its nursing home and assisted living members.

Recruitment and retention strategies:

MHCA members have employed a variety of strategies in an effort to combat the workforce crisis that predates the pandemic, including:



55%

of facilities provided bonuses specific to COVID-19, both when COVID-19 was present and when it wasn't. Bonuses were provided to ALL staff, not just those working on a COVID-19 unit. *

73%

indicated increased use of agency staff due to outbreaks, but more so, due to staffing shortages during the pandemic.

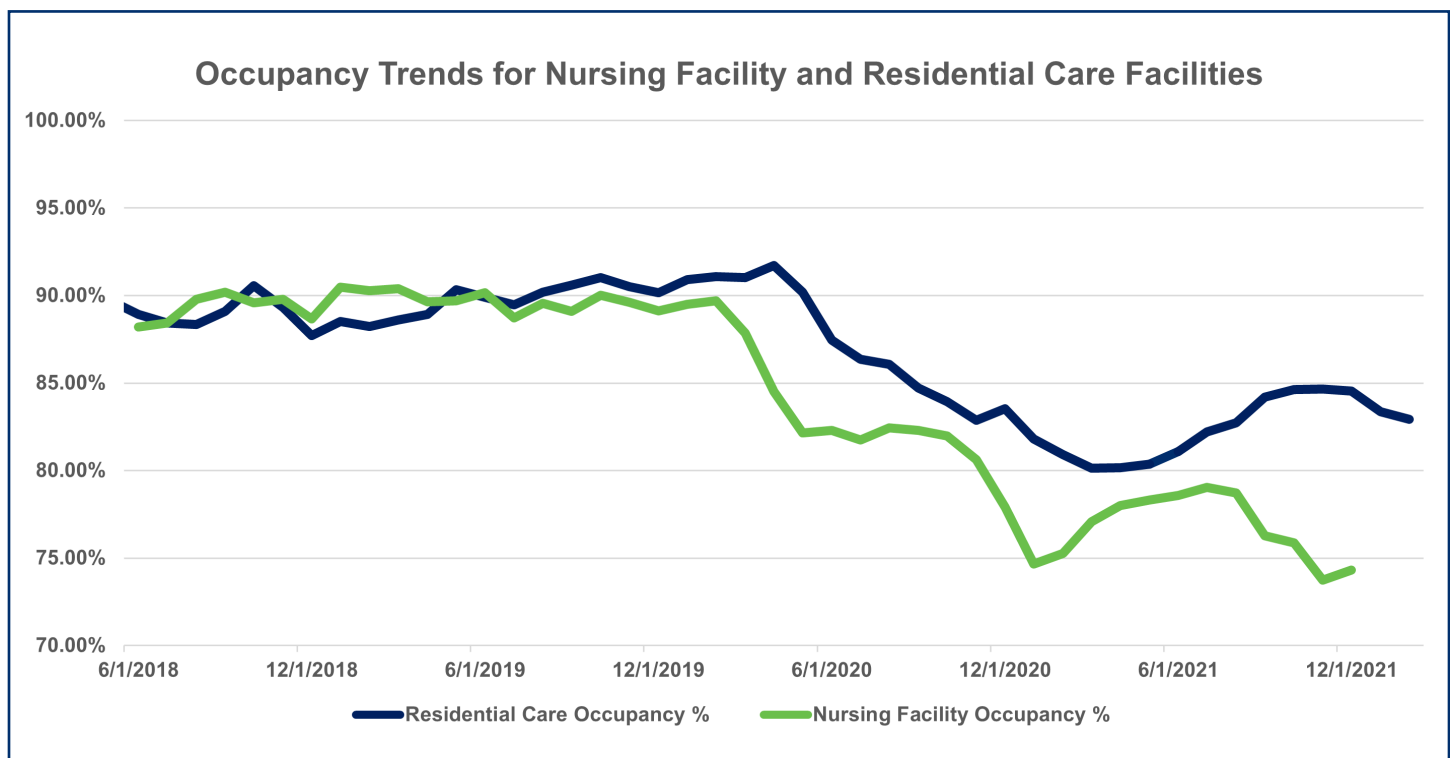
Nearly all respondents indicated increasing wages for staff during the pandemic.

In addition to bolstering compensation, facilities also conducted hiring campaigns, provided free education and training and offered mental health support services.

**Independent of general recruitment/retention bonuses.*

Occupancy slow to rebound:

The pandemic created a significant occupancy decline in our long term care facilities that continues to be exacerbated today by a shortage of staff. Although providers may have capacity, they may not have the staff to care for residents. As such, they are limiting admissions, which is contributing to access challenges across the state.



Sources: MaineCare Data Management Reports - MDS for Nursing Facilities, and Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of MaineCare Services

Cascade of closures is concerning:

For some facilities that may have been struggling before the pandemic, COVID-19 was the final straw. Maine has lost five nursing homes and one assisted living community over the past seven months. Two additional closures were recently announced.

In general, Maine's long term care facilities have been influenced by a perfect storm. We have mostly small homes that serve large numbers of MaineCare beneficiaries. Our residents require a higher level of care than in most other states. Historically, MaineCare rates haven't kept pace with the actual costs of care or increases in wage and benefit costs. Add the impact of the worldwide pandemic and it's a recipe for disaster.

The closure of a LTC facility has a devastating impact on the local community, creating job loss, and reduced access to long-term care services close to home. These are never decisions that are made quickly or lightly and are not without significant lasting impact on Maine people and our communities. A cascade of facility closures should be a clarion call to policymakers for systemic change in long term care.



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resulting in a

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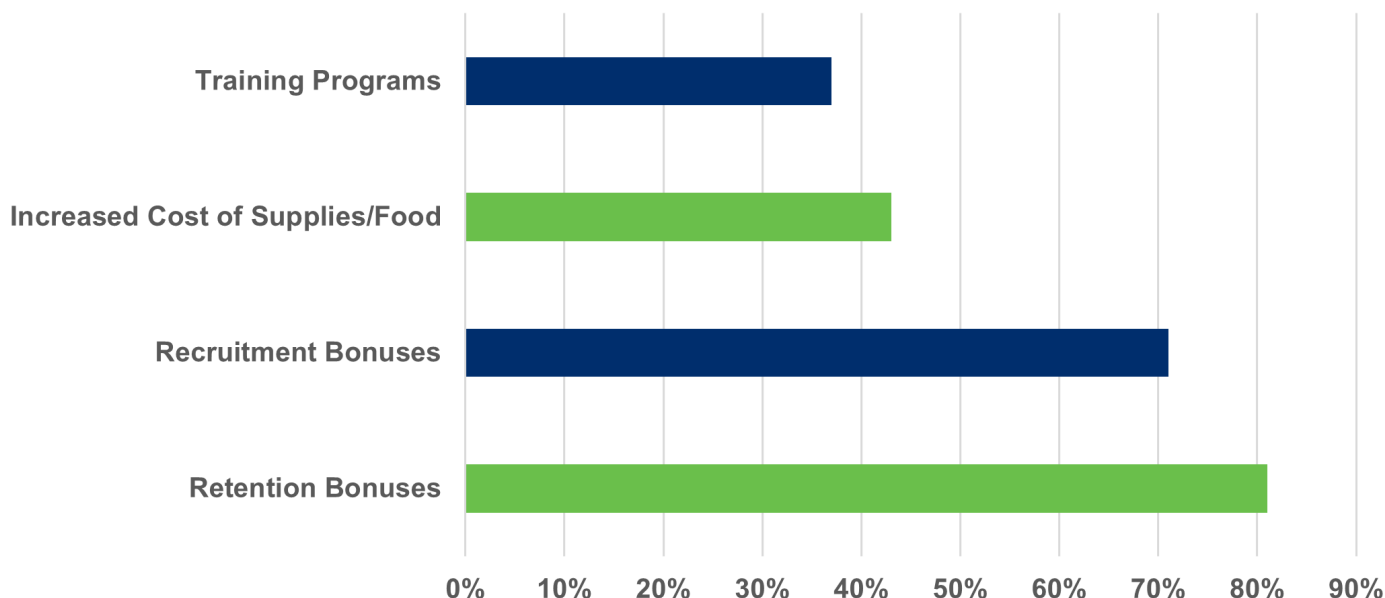
2021-2022

bed capacity **LOSS**

Government funding helps but sustainability requires ongoing investment:

Recognizing the need to support long term care facilities, Maine DHHS issued supplemental COVID-19 payments to support providers in the Fall of 2021. The MHCA survey shows:

How Facilities are Using Supplemental COVID-19 Payments



Recovery will depend on staffing, occupancy and financial support:



Until census returns to pre-pandemic levels, the long term care sector will not be healthy. Likewise, staffing levels must also improve.

According to Mark Parkinson, President and CEO of the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living, "It's very clear that moving forward, two things have to occur. The first is that census has to recover at a rate of about 1% per month and staffing must rebound. In the meantime, there will be a need for ongoing state and federal financial assistance."

Looking ahead, funding will be necessary to meet the ongoing expenses of the pandemic, including labor, personal protective equipment (PPE), testing, infection control, etc.



Providers dedicated to caring for residents:

Maine's long term care providers have risen to an occasion like no other. They have persevered to care for their residents in ways no one could have imagined. Despite glimmers of light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, it is not over for long term care. It will take time to recover, but as we emerge, there are a few things that consumers, families, staff and policymakers can count on. Maine providers are dedicated to:

- Applying the lessons learned from this pandemic;
- Renewing our commitment to our state's elderly and disabled citizens;
- Offering solutions as we prepare for a growing elderly population that deserves a robust, quality long term care system.



"It is heartbreaking to see the impact that COVID-19 has had on our facility. The people we serve deserve the very best. I'm going to keep trying." - Maine LTC Administrator

Who will care for ME?

Since health care facilities rely almost entirely on government reimbursement, federal and state policymakers must be partners in this recovery process. The 130th Legislative Session provides the opportunity to invest in long term care through reimbursement, policy improvements and workforce development.

To learn more about supporting long term care, contact MHCA at 207-623-1146.