

Initiative to educate staff on process to perform point-of-care testing at long-term care facilities leads to sustained testing resiliency



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The Pennsylvania Department of Health Southwest region Long-Term Care Resiliency, Infrastructure Support and Empowerment team identified a need for education related to requirements for point-of-care testing in long term care facilities. The team developed an educational program, resources, and established regular check-ins to assist facilities through this process.

The “What”



With funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) cooperative agreement, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) established the Long-Term Care Resiliency, Infrastructure Support and Empowerment (LTC RISE) program in January 2022 to assist long-term care facilities throughout the state with infection prevention and control efforts specific to COVID-19 as well as to provide quality improvement project opportunities to interested long-term care facilities in the areas of workforce resiliency, infection prevention and control, emergency preparedness, and sustainable outbreak response.

In order for staff to perform point-of-care testing for respiratory pathogens including Influenza A, Influenza B, and COVID-19 for residents at long-term care facilities in the state of Pennsylvania, facilities need to obtain a federal Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) Certificate of Waiver issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in addition to a PA DOH Clinical Laboratory Permit issued by the Bureau of Laboratories.

Through telephonic consultations and on-site assessments related to COVID-19 outbreak prevention and mitigation, the LTC RISE team identified a need for education related to requirements for point-of-care testing. The team developed education related to the process of how to obtain a CLIA Certificate of Waiver and PA DOH Clinical Laboratory



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Permit geared toward an audience of long-term care facility staff. Leave behind resources, including blank forms, sample forms, CMS “How to Obtain a CLIA Waiver” guide, CMS “CLIA Quick Start Guide,” and PA DOH “COVID-19 Laboratory Testing Frequently Asked Questions” were provided as well. It was quickly identified that one-time training was not sufficient to assist

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with successful completion of these applications. LTC RISE case workers provided weekly telephonic follow-up to support facilities throughout the process as well as to facilitate communication with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Laboratories to help track progress as liaisons on behalf of long-term care facilities.

The “So What”

The LTC RISE team in the Southwest region has been able to directly impact 36 long-term care facilities to offer education and assistance with this initiative. To date, 12 of these long-term care facilities have successfully sent a completed application package with the remainder of applications currently in process. This initiative has been timely as the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency has removed funding for many resources that the government provided free to facilities in crisis throughout the pandemic. By providing facilities with specific details on how to develop a sustainable testing plan for long-term care facilities within Pennsylvania we can ensure rapid access to testing allows facilities to immediately institute isolation and quarantine precautions to ultimately mitigate outbreak spread.

The “Now What”

The LTC RISE team in the Southwest region shared this initiative with other LTC RISE regions who also implemented this training with the facilities they serve. Challenges encountered have included costs as well as the multiple steps and parties involved. This initiative is essential in ensuring testing resiliency continues at the long-term care facility level in compliance with state and federal regulations, allowing for accurate and timely outbreak mitigation in the future, thereby increasing the quality of resident care delivered.

While the CLIA certificate of waiver initiative has been very beneficial for facilities performing SARS-CoV-2 testing for residents and staff, it is also applicable to many other diagnostic tests falling under the low-complexity CLIA-waived designation, including Influenza A, Influenza B, Respiratory Syncytial Virus, and Group A Streptococcus to name a few. Continued LTC RISE collaboration with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Laboratories has been essential to this initiative’s success. The LTC RISE team looks forward to collaborating with LTC RISE partners in other regions to institute this initiative state-wide. Similar initiatives could also be tailored to other state-specific regulations.

Key contributors to this project include Melanie Marien, Alison Chestnut, Paulina Brown, and Southwest AMI RISE Team.