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Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado



It is hard to believe that October is already here and that this marks our final IL-HPCO newsletter of 2026!

Every year, as the leaves begin to change, I am reminded of the beauty that surrounds us and the importance of slowing down to appreciate life's small and simple moments. A walk on a crisp autumn morning, sipping a pumpkin spice coffee, or catching up with friends over dinner. These moments remind us that even in the midst of the busyness, challenges, and sometimes heaviness of the work we do, there is always room for joy, gratitude, and connection.

IL-HPCO has continued its commitment to interdisciplinary professional development through our 2026 Workshop Series, and I could not be more inspired by the engagement, enthusiasm, and collaboration we have witnessed across the state.

In July, we welcomed a vibrant and engaging group of music therapists to Northern Illinois Hospice in Rockford. The afternoon was filled with the sharing of best practices, successes, creative ideas, and, of course, music! It was a wonderful reminder of the powerful role music therapy plays in hospice care and the importance of creating opportunities for these dedicated professionals to learn from one another.

In August, we had a phenomenal turnout for our Volunteer Managers Workshop, generously hosted by Uplifted Care in Bourbonnais. More than 20 volunteer managers and hospice professionals from across Illinois came together, ready to share their experiences, challenges, and innovative ideas for strengthening volunteer services.

One of the most exciting outcomes of this workshop was the creation of a **Volunteer Managers Roundtable**, which will continue meeting monthly via Zoom. A huge thank-you to Brooke Calderone from Transitions Care for stepping up to lead this new initiative!

This is exactly what we envisioned when we launched our professional workshop series: bringing together mission-driven hospice professionals, creating meaningful connections, and building opportunities for ongoing collaboration that ultimately strengthen the care we provide to patients and families.

In September, we hosted our second Bereavement Coordinators Workshop, building on the success of our inaugural gathering in October 2025. Once again, generously hosted by VITAS in Lombard, this workshop provided an opportunity for a deeper dive into bereavement assessments, regulatory requirements, and best practices. I am thrilled to share that this group will also transition into an ongoing virtual roundtable, led by Patrice Martin from Lightways.

Watching these professional connections grow beyond a single afternoon and evolve into ongoing communities of learning and support has been one of the most rewarding parts of this year's work. It is another reminder of the extraordinary people working in hospice organizations throughout Illinois and the incredible things that can happen when we come together.

Although the year is winding down, we still have two exciting opportunities to connect before we turn the calendar to 2027!

On October 23, we hosted our third and final Regional Meeting of the year at Blessing Hospital in Quincy. I was happy to connect with hospice and palliative care colleagues in the western and southern regions of our state, sharing updates on important issues impacting our field, and learn more about the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural providers. These conversations are so important as we work to ensure that the voices and needs of hospice providers across *all* of Illinois are represented.

We will also close out our 2026 Professional Development Workshop Series with a workshop dedicated to hospice social workers, hosted by Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care in Joliet. We have assembled an outstanding lineup of speakers who will explore important topics related to cultural competency, healthcare disparities, and caring for diverse populations at the end of life. Attendees will have the opportunity to earn three continuing education credits in cultural competency.

As a social worker myself, I am particularly excited about this opportunity to bring colleagues together for meaningful learning, conversation, and connection. I encourage hospice leaders to support their social work teams in attending!

Looking Ahead to 2027: A Rising Tide
As we begin to look toward the new year, I am incredibly excited to share some wonderful news!

IL-HPCO will be bringing back a full-day conference in 2027!
Please save the date for **May 19, 2027**, when we will gather at NIU in Naperville for a full day of education, networking, inspiration, and collaboration.

Our theme for 2027 will be:
A Rising Tide: Elevating Hospice Care Together

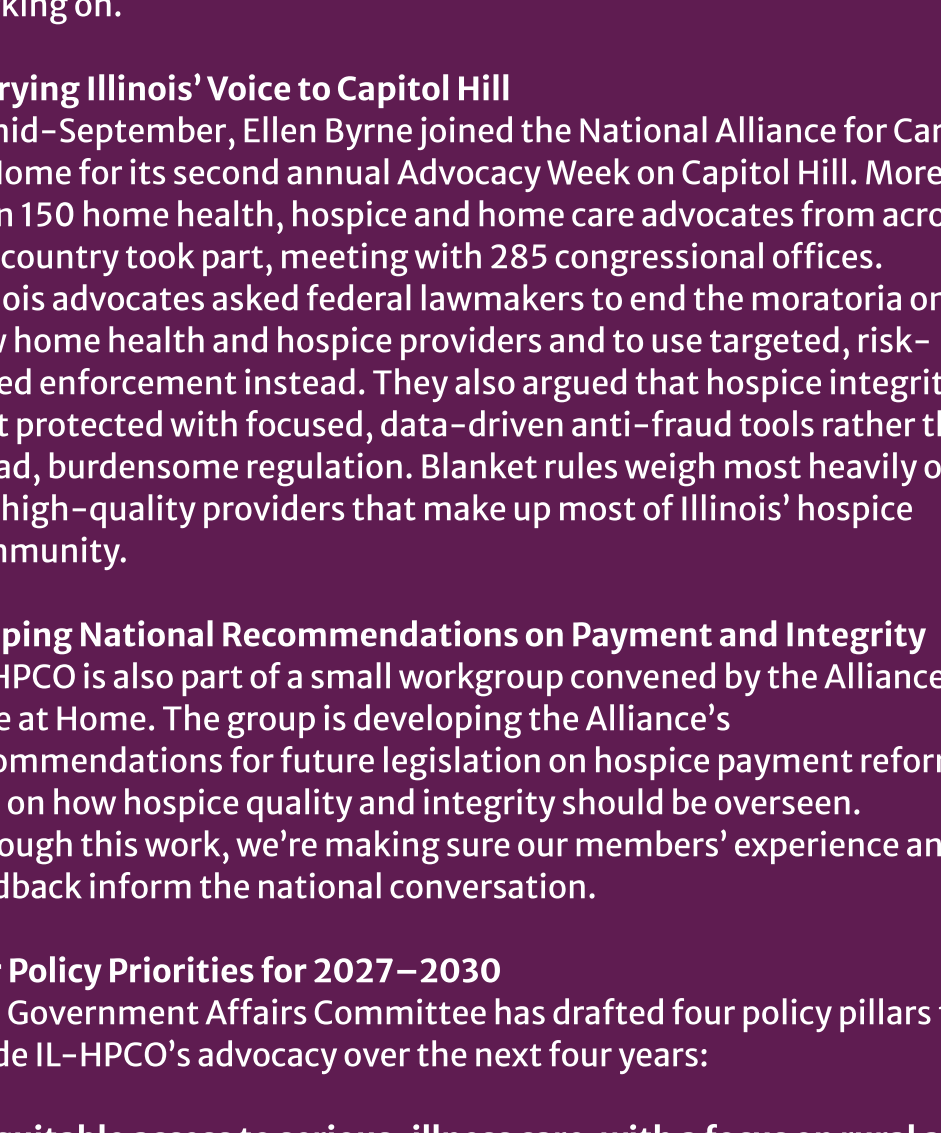
I cannot think of a more fitting theme for the times we are navigating.

There is no question that hospice providers are facing significant and, in many ways, unprecedented challenges. From regulatory changes and increasing scrutiny to workforce pressures and the evolving needs of patients and families, the waters we navigate are not always calm.

But I also believe deeply in the power of this hospice community. When we share our knowledge, advocate for one another, celebrate our successes, and work together to address our challenges, we become stronger. A rising tide lifts all boats, and when we elevate one another, we elevate the quality of hospice care throughout Illinois.

That is the spirit I hope we will carry into 2027, and I cannot wait to see what we can accomplish together!

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne



Laying the Groundwork for 2027: A Government Affairs Update
This fall, IL-HPCO's Government Affairs Committee and staff have been laying the groundwork for Illinois hospices to serve their patients well in 2027 and beyond. Here's a look at what we've been working on.

Carrying Illinois' Voice to Capitol Hill
In mid-September, Ellen Byrne joined the National Alliance for Care at Home for its second annual Advocacy Week on Capitol Hill. More than 150 home health, hospice and home care advocates from across the country took part, meeting with 285 congressional offices. Illinois advocates asked federal lawmakers to end the moratoria on new home health and hospice providers and to use targeted, risk-based enforcement instead. They also argued that hospice integrity is best protected with focused, data-driven anti-fraud tools rather than broad, burdensome regulation. Blanket rules weigh most heavily on the high-quality providers that make up most of Illinois' hospice community.

Shaping National Recommendations on Payment and Integrity
IL-HPCO is also part of a small workgroup convened by the Alliance for Care at Home. The group is developing the Alliance's recommendations for future legislation on hospice payment reform and on how hospice quality and integrity should be overseen. Through this work, we're making sure our members' experience and feedback inform the national conversation.

Our Policy Priorities for 2027–2030
The Government Affairs Committee has drafted four policy pillars to guide IL-HPCO's advocacy over the next four years:

1. Equitable access to serious-illness care, with a focus on rural and underserved urban communities. We want people living with serious illness in under-resourced communities to be better understood and better cared for. That means building a more diverse workforce through training and education funding, making greater use of community health workers, and helping clinicians draw out and honor patients' own goals of care.

2. Supporting patients and families in understanding their end-of-life options. We will help member hospices deliver respectful, high-quality care and comply with the Illinois End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act. We will also help terminally ill Illinoisans understand the differences between hospice, palliative care and medical aid in dying (MAID).

3. Targeted legislative and regulatory work that supports high-quality providers and fights fraud, waste and abuse. We want Illinois hospices to be financially sustainable, to find state and federal compliance more manageable, and to deliver on the promise of high-quality hospice and palliative care for every seriously ill patient in the state.

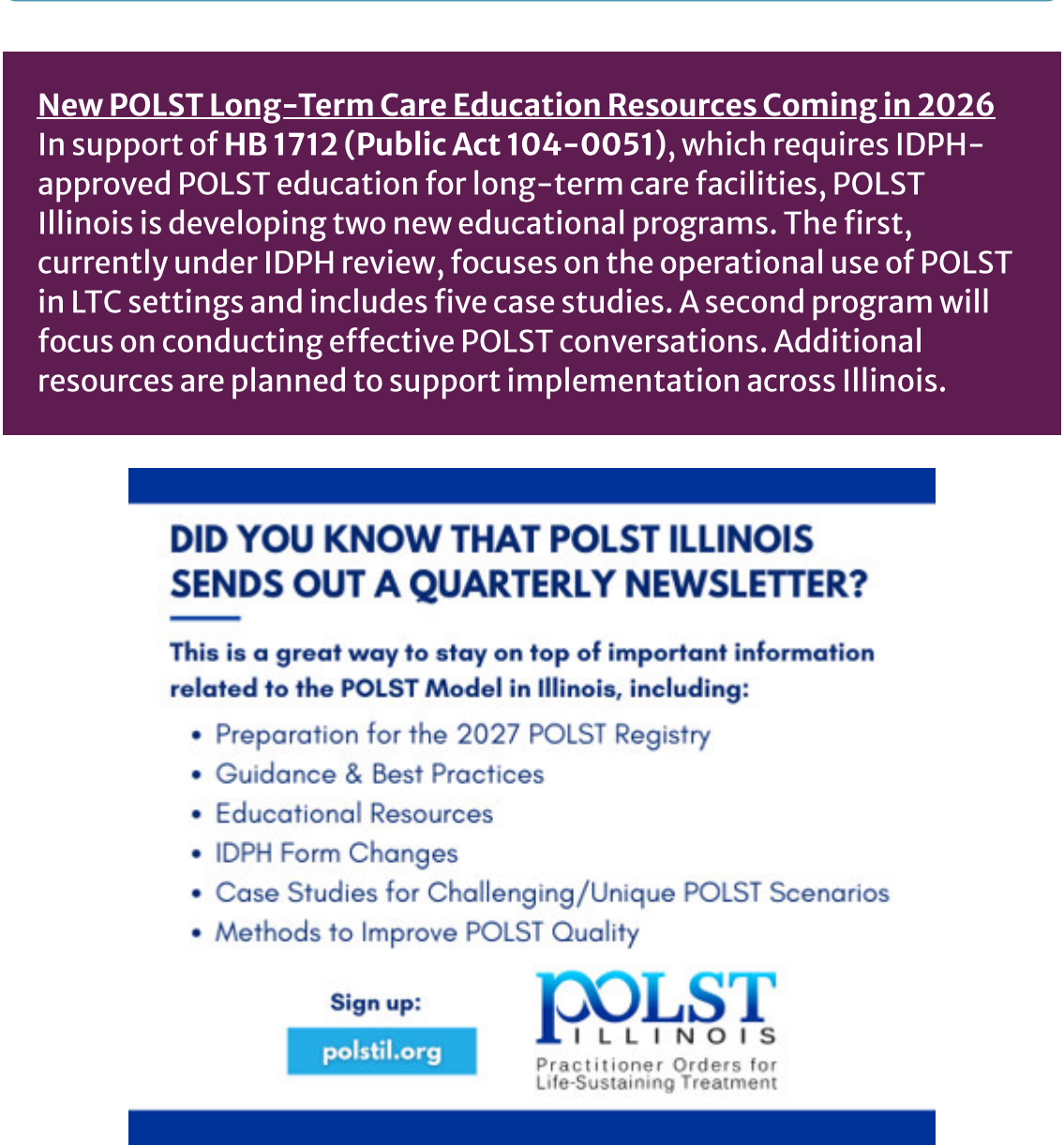
4. Health information interoperability that supports goal-concordant care. Hospice providers should be able to see real-time health information and claims data for their patients. This pillar includes continued advocacy for a working POLST registry that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Finalizing the State's Report on Serious Illness
Several IL-HPCO members are helping prepare a comprehensive report on serious illness in Illinois. The report is required by a 2025 state law (Public Act 104-0253) that IL-HPCO helped pass. The law directs the state's Hospice and Palliative Care Advisory Board to report to the General Assembly by December 31, 2026, on care for people with serious or life-limiting illnesses and their family caregivers. The report will include:

- A description of the needs of seriously ill Illinoisans and how many residents that population includes
- Data on the availability of hospice and palliative care services across the state
- Evidence of the value of non-hospice palliative care
- Recommended minimum standards for community-based palliative care programs
- Evidence-based recommendations for educating health care professionals and the public about non-hospice palliative care

Get Involved
The Government Affairs Committee meets monthly and welcomes member input. To share your perspective or get involved, contact Ellen Byrne, Director of Policy & Government Affairs, at ebyrne@il-hpco.org.





POLST Update from Chair Lindsay McKenzie

New POLST Long-Term Care Education Resources Coming in 2026
In support of **HB 1712 (Public Act 104-0051)**, which requires IDPH-approved POLST education for long-term care facilities, POLST Illinois is developing two new educational programs. The first, currently under IDPH review, focuses on the operational use of POLST in LTC settings and includes five case studies. A second program will focus on conducting effective POLST conversations. Additional resources are planned to support implementation across Illinois.



Join us! November 13: Hospice Social Worker Workshop



Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization | Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care | Sponsored by: McKESSON

Register

July 2026: Music Therapy Workshop



August 2026: Volunteer Managers Workshop



September 2026: Bereavement Coordinators Workshop



Quarter 3 Member Spotlights







2027 Conference



We are excited to share that IL-HPCO's conference will be back next year! Save the date! Stay tuned for more details about RFP submission and registration.

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

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