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Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization
Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado

Happy Summer Hospice Colleagues! 2025 is already halfway over and, as you will read in this quarter's newsletter, IL-HPCO has been extremely busy working on your behalf to provide education and advocacy in support of all our members and the organizations that they represent.

On May 20th, we held our most successful conference to date – a day chock full of networking, new connections and education. If you attended, THANK YOU. I hope you found it as inspiring and motivating as I did. If you could not attend, no worries! Thanks to a generous grant from ELEA Institute, we were able to record the entire event which will be available soon to all IL-HPCO members via our newly redesigned website. Stay tuned for more details very soon.

Much of the work of IL-HPCO happens behind the scenes. On May 19th (the day before the annual conference), the IL-HPCO Board of Directors met for a day long retreat focused on sustainability, strategic planning and organizational development. This group of individuals is committed to ensuring that IL-HPCO continues to grow and thrive for many years to come. We left the day with a plan for growth, finding new and innovative ways to reach more hospice professionals and ensuring that the mission of IL-HPCO remains at the forefront of all the work that we are doing. I want to thank each of the board members who attended and participated for sharing their wisdom and expertise and for always being willing to offer support and guidance as we navigate new challenges and opportunities.

If you are interested in getting more involved with IL-HPCO, whether it be as a committee member, a board member or in some other capacity, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly at sdado@il-hpco.org. There are many ways to get involved!

Enjoy the rest of the summer and I look forward to seeing you soon at one of our events!

IL-HPCO Board Retreat
Thinking Strategically

Attendees of the IL-HPCO Board Retreat.

Letter from Chairperson Merilee Smith

Recently, I have been reflecting on how much the field of palliative and hospice care has changed since I began working in hospice in 2008. The place that IL-HPCO sits in 2025, as an organization offering support, resources, education and advocacy has evolved, and I believe for the better.

I am looking forward to retiring this year. And I am finding that like what our patients experience as life review; I am experiencing career review. My time with IL-HPCO has been a huge highlight of my career in hospice. I have made dear friends and learned so much about end-of-life care. I have also had the privilege of representing a membership of organizations that share goals of delivering excellent end-of-life care too. If you are considering getting more involved with IL-HPCO, I urge you to reach out to Sara Dado or myself today. I can promise you that you will find your time spent with IL-HPCO as well spent.

In 2017, the organization I worked for, a national for profit, joined IL-HPCO. I had been to the Education Conference as a non-member the prior year. Joining was a tremendous stretch for a national company, and I credit Barb Underwood the Area Vice-President of Operations with fighting for this resource with our national compliance team that did not see the value of a state organization. Upon further investigation the national team determined that IL-HPCO membership was valuable not only to the Illinois sites I represented but nationally too. Many of our staff from all over the country attended webinars, including a fabulous series by We Honor Vets, WHV, that IL-HPCO had secured a grant to provide with no attendance fees.

In 2023, I joined Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care as the IPU Director. Again, I have the good fortune of working with someone, Lightways' CEO Mary Kay Sheehan, who recognizes the value of membership in IL-HPCO. Mary Kay is a former Chair of the Board of Directors of IL-HPCO. I have several co-workers who are active members of IL-HPCO committees, guests and presenters too. This creates a culture that is mission based, and I find to be rewarding.

I look back on the last few months and we have so many things to be grateful for bringing to our members and hopefully future members. We had a successful Education Conference held on May 20th, 2025, at NIU's Naperville campus. Our social media presence has grown. Katie Lord's podcast, In the Passenger Seat, has helped meet a need – timely information that is interesting to our membership and easily accessible.

Please take a moment to read about the plans and events of IL-HPCO in the articles by Katie Lord on Education and Ellen Byrne on Government Affairs and the POLST committee.

There is so much going on, I do not want you or your teams to miss any of it!

Thank you all for the work you do every day.

Education Update from Katie Lord

As we reflect on the past few months, the IL-HPCO Education Program has much to celebrate—and even more to look forward to!

First, we want to thank everyone who joined us at our 2025 Annual Conference in May. The event was a tremendous success, bringing together over 125 hospice and palliative care professionals from across the state. With powerful keynote speakers, dynamic breakout sessions, and meaningful reflection opportunities, the conference truly embodied this year's theme: Back To Basics. Your engagement and feedback continue to shape our programming and reaffirm our commitment to providing relevant, high-quality education across all disciplines and in a variety of formats.

Looking ahead, we're excited to continue fostering connection and collaboration at our upcoming Regional Meeting, hosted at Hospice of Southern Illinois on July 25th. This in-person event will provide a look at Medical Aid in Dying, so we can all have a deeper understanding of the pending legislation and learn how to have meaningful conversations around this challenging topic! We hope to see many of you there!

We're also proud to announce that the IL-HPCO Podcast "In The Passenger Seat" is now live and available on Apple, Spotify, and all major podcast platforms! This will allow members to easily access episodes while on the go, and to easily share it within their organization. This podcast offers insightful episodes focused on a variety of topics all geared towards elevating the quality of care we provide every day. It's designed specifically for the busy nature of hospice work—so whether you're driving between visits or sitting in an office, we invite you to tune in and learn with us.

There's no slowing down this fall! Mark your calendars for our Cultural Competency CEU Event for Social Workers, coming this September 18. We're also building out discipline-specific workshops to ensure our education meets the unique needs of every member of the interdisciplinary team! Stay tuned!

Finally, we're thrilled to be putting the finishing touches on our Learning Management System (LMS) Platform, Thinkific. This platform will expand access to on-demand education, CEU opportunities, and downloadable resources—all designed to support professional development on your schedule.

Thank you for being part of the IL-HPCO community. Your work, your passion, and your commitment inspire everything we do. I am so proud of where we are going as an organization!

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne

At the heart of our mission to expand and improve hospice and palliative care in Illinois is the work of the IL-HPCO Government Affairs Committee. This dedicated group of volunteers from our member organizations works year-round to monitor legislation, influence regulations, and advance policies that ensure all Illinois hospice & palliative care providers can effectively deliver compassionate, person-centered care for patients and families facing serious illness.

We are proud to report a highly successful 2025 state legislative session, with four IL-HPCO-supported bills passed by the General Assembly. One of the key wins this session was HB 3849, which will make it easier for hospice teams to ensure timely access to medication. Under the new law, any authorized hospice employee—rather than just a nurse or physician—can pick up and deliver prescriptions, including controlled substances, to a patient's home or place of work. This change will help reduce treatment delays and streamline care delivery in home-based settings. The law will take effect Jan. 1, 2026.

HB 2877 requires the Illinois Hospice and Palliative Care Advisory Board to submit a report to the General Assembly on the state of care for individuals with serious or life-limiting illnesses. This report will include recommendations for standardizing and expanding access to community-based palliative care, and it represents a step forward in making comprehensive, person-centered care more available statewide.

The passage of HB 2397 was another important victory. This bill requires the Illinois Department of Corrections to annually collect and publish data related to hospice and palliative care services provided to incarcerated individuals. By increasing transparency and accountability, this policy advances the rights and dignity of people receiving care at the end of life—regardless of setting.

Finally, HB 1712 strengthens education and understanding of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Uniform POLST form by requiring IDPH to make training materials available on its website. The bill also promotes annual education for staff at skilled and intermediate care nursing facilities, ensuring that providers have the knowledge needed to support informed decisions and properly complete POLST forms. The POLST model is a critical component of advance care planning for people with serious illnesses. In the nursing home setting, goals of care discussions that take place during conversations around the POLST form, can spur decisions to focus on comfort rather than lengthening life which helps residents transition to hospice at the right time.

These efforts, supported by many stakeholder organizations and 36 different elected officials who signed on to sponsor our bills demonstrate the strength and reach of our advocacy network. We wish to especially thank Representative Nicolle Grasse who was elected in 2024 to represent the 53rd State District of Illinois (Arlington Heights). She has been a hospice chaplain with VITAS for over 30 years and is now an incredibly powerful voice for hospice & palliative care in the Illinois General Assembly. We look forward to working with Rep. Grasse to improve care for patients and families in our communities.

In addition to our legislative victories, IL-HPCO successfully opposed two bills that could have introduced confusion and unnecessary administrative burden: HB 2781, which proposed changes to death certificate procedures, and SB 2400, which would have mandated hospice data reporting requirements without provider input.

We also closely monitored a bill on medical aid in dying, which passed the House but did not receive a vote in the Senate. IL-HPCO continues to analyze and engage on this issue.

Through our Reimbursement Working Group, IL-HPCO is also addressing the complexities of Medicaid room and board passthrough billing. Under the leadership of committee member Carrie Bill and Kelly Schnetzer, the group is collecting data on billing denials from January through April of 2025 to inform our strategy for simplifying the process and securing fair reimbursement.

At the federal level, IL-HPCO remains active through its partnership with the National Alliance for Care at Home. This includes tracking the ten-year budget reconciliation process, submitting comments on the 2025 Medicare hospice rule, and monitoring the ongoing conversation around the Medicare Advantage Hospice Carve-In.

The IL-HPCO Government Affairs Committee needs your voice, insight, and experience. Whether you're responding to an action alert, participating in a virtual meeting with your legislator, or sharing your challenges by responding to an online survey, your input powers our collective advocacy. Together, we are shaping hospice & palliative care policy that places the dignity, autonomy, and comfort of every seriously ill Illinoisan at the center of care. If you'd like to get more involved, please reach out to Ellen Byrne (ebyrne@il-hpco.org) to join us at an upcoming committee meeting.

House
Hearing Room
114
ublic Entrance

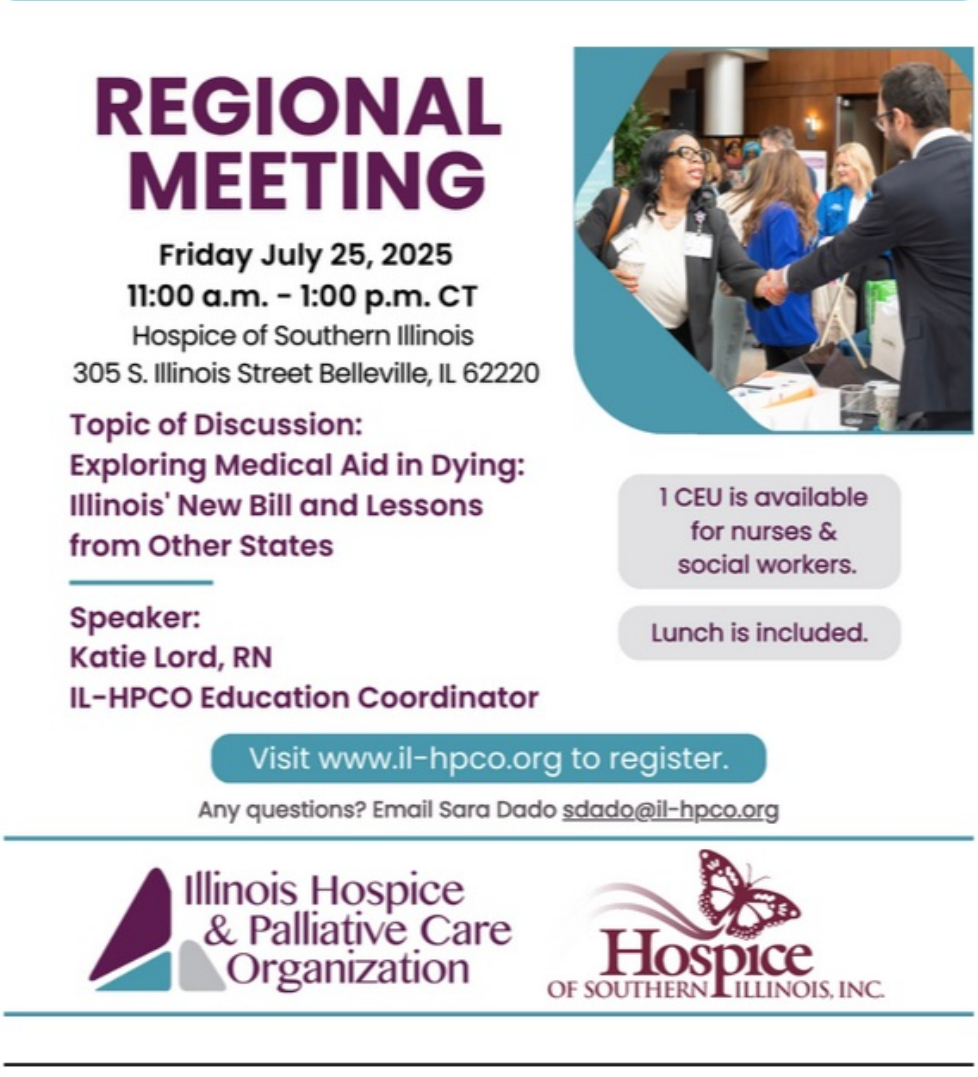
Rep. Grasse and Ellen Byrne pictured during the 2025 legislative session.

ILHPCO 2025 Education Conference

HCAHPS
SMART

The 2025 Education conference was a tremendous success thanks to all of the participants, speakers, supporters and sponsors. We are excited to begin planning next year's conference. Stay tuned!

Join us on July 25: Regional Meeting at Hospice of Southern Illinois



REGIONAL MEETING

Friday July 25, 2025
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. CT
Hospice of Southern Illinois
305 S. Illinois Street Belleville, IL 62220

Topic of Discussion:
Exploring Medical Aid in Dying: Illinois' New Bill and Lessons from Other States

Speaker:
Katie Lord, RN
IL-HPCO Education Coordinator

1 CEU is available for nurses & social workers.

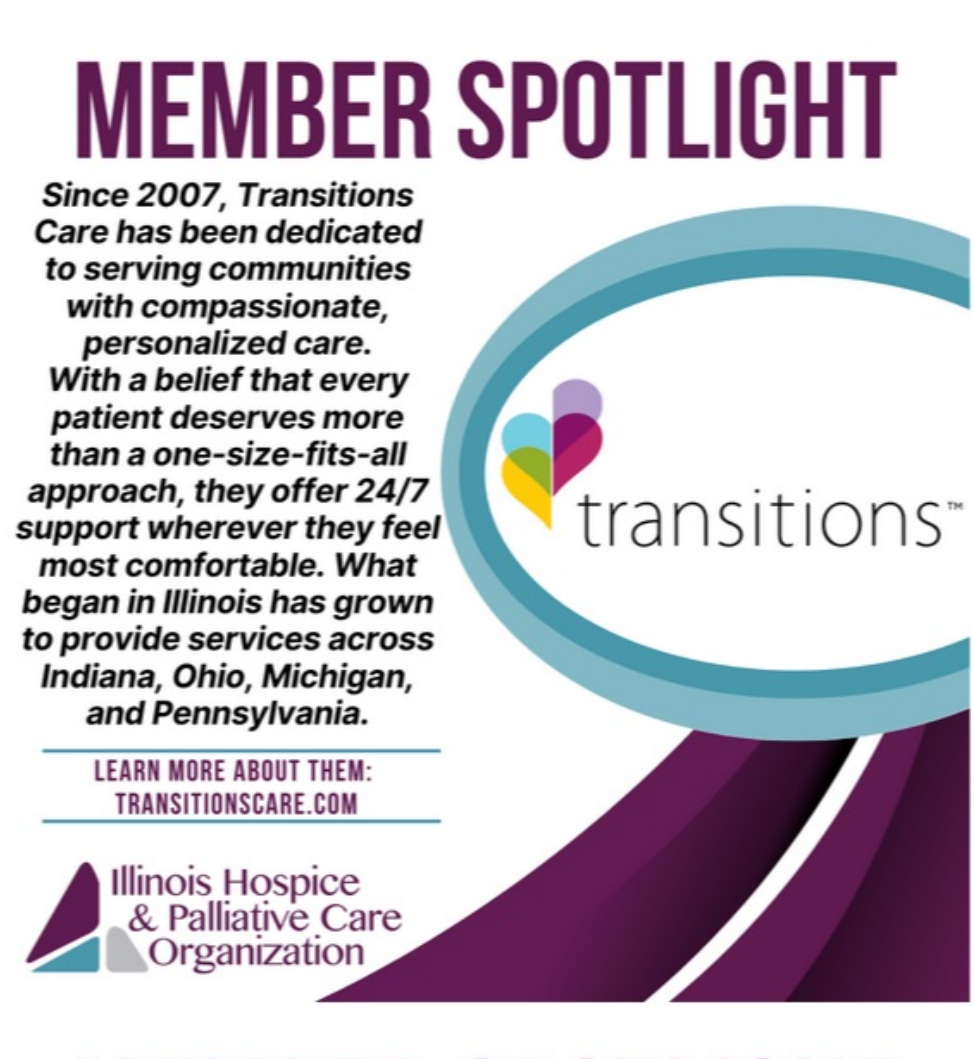
Lunch is included.

Visit www.il-hpco.org to register.

Any questions? Email Sara Dado sdado@il-hpco.org

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization
Hospice of Southern Illinois, Inc.

Quarter 2 Member Spotlights



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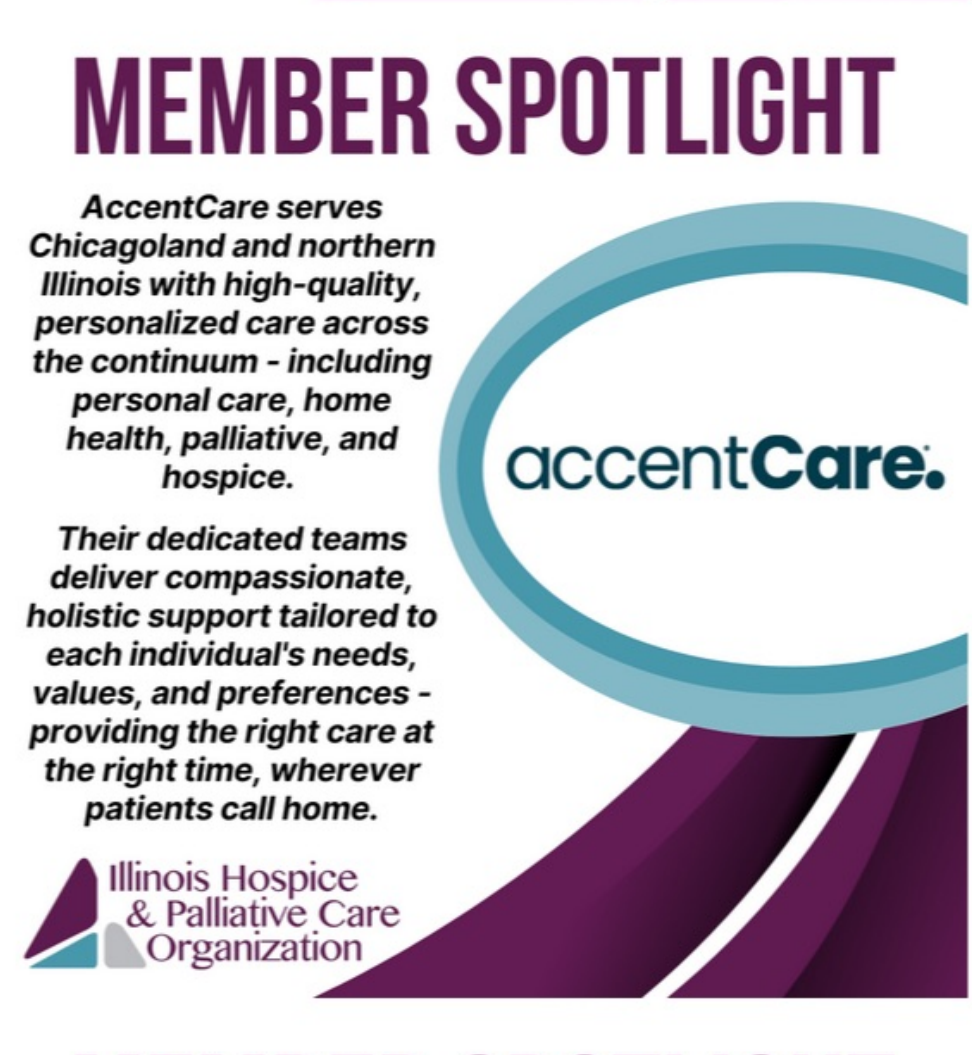

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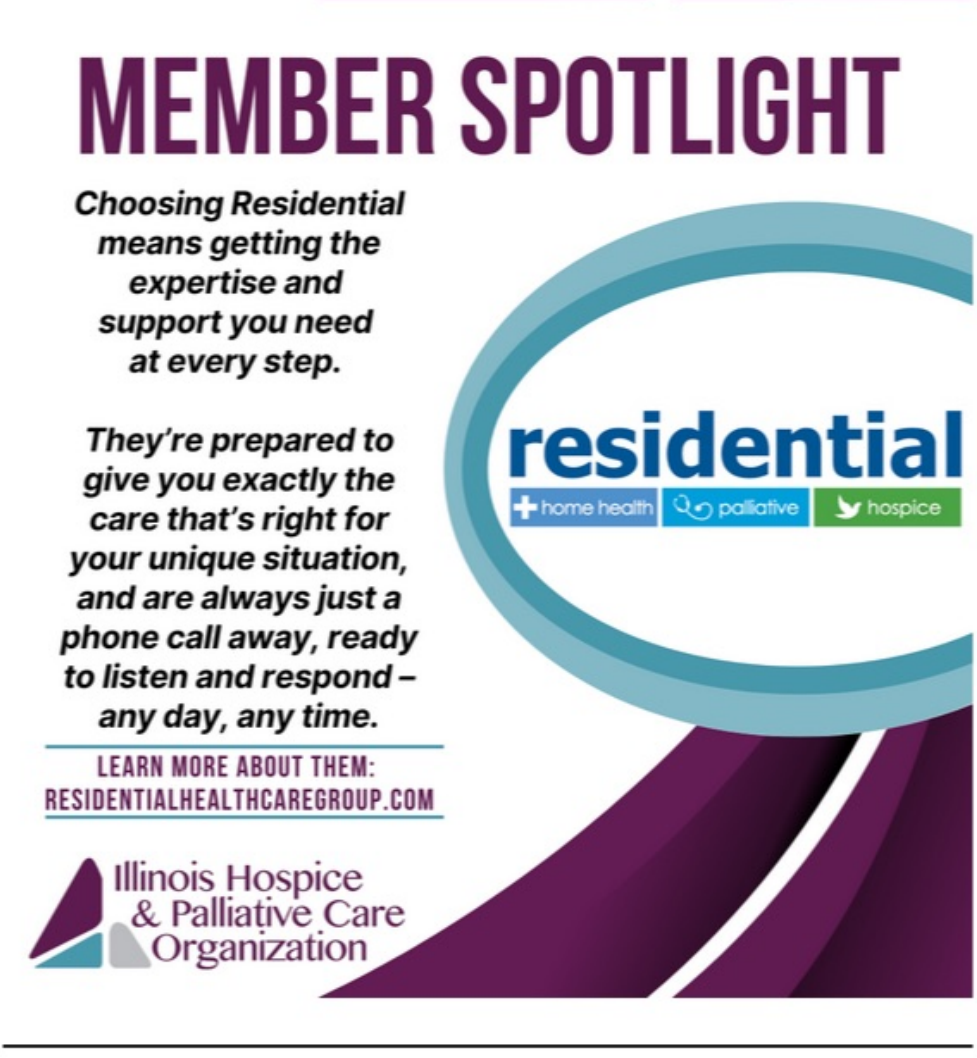

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