Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado

As we move into the heart of summer, I want to take a moment to wish each of you a safe, relaxing, and enjoyable season. While many of us look forward to spending time with family and friends, I also know that hospice never takes a summer break. Every day, hospice professionals across Illinois continue to provide compassionate, expert care to patients and families when they need it most. Your dedication, kindness, and unwavering commitment to our mission are truly inspiring, and I am grateful for all that you do.

I'd also like to share some wonderful news! On May 6, IL-HPCO Education Coordinator, Katie Lord, and her family welcomed a beautiful baby boy, Hunter Lord. Some of you had the chance to meet Hunter at the Summer Regional Meeting last month! Please join me in congratulating Katie on this exciting new addition! We have certainly missed her over the past few months and are looking forward to welcoming her back later this month to resume her support of education initiatives and to bring back our amazing podcast- *In the Passenger Seat- Hospice Conversations!*

This spring and early summer have been filled with opportunities to connect, learn, and grow together. Thank you to everyone who joined us for our Summer Regional Meeting in June, graciously hosted by Oasis Hospice and Palliative Care and House of Goshen in Flossmoor. The outstanding attendance and the thoughtful discussions reminded me once again of the strength of our hospice community and the value of coming together to share ideas, address challenges, and support one another.

I also want to thank those who participated in our Spiritual Care Workshop at Unity Hospice in May. The workshop offered meaningful education and reflection while reinforcing the importance of caring for the emotional and spiritual needs of those we serve. It was inspiring to see so many professionals committed to expanding their knowledge and strengthening this essential aspect of hospice care. Events like these remind us that hospice care extends far beyond medical treatment—it is about caring for the whole person with compassion, dignity, and presence.

Our educational programming continues with our Music Therapy Workshop on Wednesday, July 23 from 1-4pm Northern Illinois Hospice in Rockford. This workshop offers a unique opportunity to explore the impact of music therapy in hospice care and is designed for music therapists, interdisciplinary team members, and anyone interested in enhancing the quality of care through creative and evidence-based approaches. If you haven't already registered, we encourage you to join us for what promises to be an engaging and informative afternoon.

As always, thank you for the work you do every day. Hospice care is built on compassion, collaboration, and a deep commitment to serving others with dignity and respect. Because of you, thousands of patients and families across Illinois receive comfort, support, and hope during some of life's most difficult moments.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming events and educational programs. Until then, thank you for your continued partnership and for all you do to advance the hospice mission throughout Illinois.

Wishing you and your families a wonderful summer.

Katie Lord with her newborn son Hunter

Letter from Co-chair Carrie Bill & Kelly Schnetzer

Navigating Reimbursement Challenges Together
How the IL-HPCO Reimbursement Workgroup Supports Providers Across Illinois

The reimbursement landscape for hospice and palliative care providers continues to grow more complex. Evolving regulations, changing payer requirements, claims denials, authorization challenges, and administrative burdens all create obstacles that can impact both operations and patient care.

To help providers navigate these challenges, the Illinois Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (IL-HPCO) Reimbursement Workgroup brings together reimbursement leaders, billing professionals, and operational experts from across the state. Through collaboration, education, and advocacy, the workgroup serves as a valuable resource for hospice and palliative care organizations while providing a unified voice on reimbursement-related issues affecting providers throughout Illinois.

A Forum for Collaboration and Problem Solving
One of the greatest strengths of the Reimbursement Workgroup is the opportunity for providers to share experiences and learn from one another. While organizations may differ in size and structure, many face similar reimbursement challenges.

Workgroup members regularly discuss topics such as:

- Medicare and Medicaid billing requirements
- Managed care reimbursement issues
- Claims denials and appeals
- Documentation and compliance concerns
- Revenue cycle best practices
- Emerging payer trends and policy changes

These discussions allow providers to compare experiences, identify trends, and develop practical solutions to common challenges.

Building Partnerships with Managed Care Organizations
Beyond peer collaboration, the workgroup plays an important role in fostering strong relationships with Illinois Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).

Each quarter, IL-HPCO facilitates meetings with individual MCO leadership teams where providers can share trends and concerns reported across the hospice community. These meetings create an opportunity to discuss operational challenges, ask questions about upcoming payer initiatives, identify system issues impacting providers, and collaborate on potential improvements.

Just as important, these conversations help establish productive working relationships between hospice providers and MCO leadership. Open communication allows issues to be addressed more efficiently and helps ensure that providers have direct access to key decision-makers when concerns arise.

Partnering with HFS to Drive Change
The workgroup also maintains ongoing engagement with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS). Through bi-monthly meetings, providers and state leaders discuss reimbursement issues, operational concerns, and opportunities for program improvement.

Over the past year, the workgroup has been actively involved in advocating for important updates impacting hospice providers, including:

- Notice of Election (NOE) process improvements
- Patient Credit File (PCF) updates
- Resolution of operational and claims-processing challenges
- Clarification of policy and billing requirements

These discussions provide a direct channel for providers to raise concerns and offer feedback while helping HFS better understand the real-world impact of policies and processes.

Escalating Issues and Improving Outcomes
Another key component of the group's work involves collaboration with both HFS and the Illinois Association of Managed Health Plans (IAMHP).

Quarterly meetings bring together hospice providers, managed care representatives, and state stakeholders to review issues submitted through established complaint and escalation channels. These discussions focus on identifying recurring challenges, monitoring resolution efforts, and developing strategies to improve processes across the healthcare system. By creating transparency and accountability around provider concerns, these meetings help ensure that issues are not only identified but actively addressed.

Advocacy Through Collective Voice
One of IL-HPCO's most valuable contributions is its ability to transform individual provider concerns into broader advocacy efforts.

Challenges experienced by a single organization are often shared across the industry. Through the Reimbursement Workgroup, providers can identify common themes, quantify the impact of issues, and bring those concerns forward to payers, HFS, and other stakeholders.

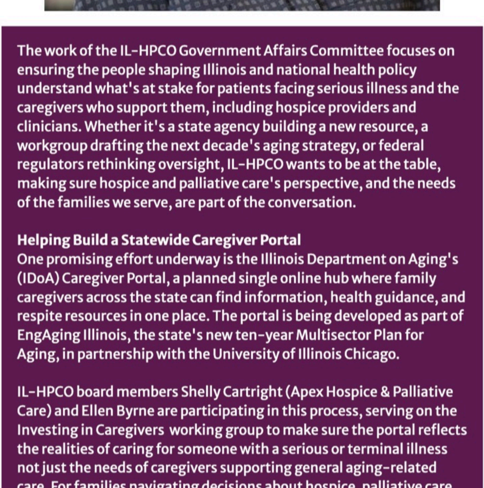
This collective approach amplifies the voice of hospice providers and creates opportunities for meaningful change that would be difficult to achieve individually.

Looking Ahead
As healthcare reimbursement continues to evolve, collaboration among providers, managed care organizations, and state agencies has never been more important.

The IL-HPCO Reimbursement Workgroup serves as a bridge between these stakeholders—bringing providers together to share knowledge, fostering stronger relationships with payers, partnering with HFS on policy and process improvements, and advocating for solutions that support high-quality hospice and palliative care.

While reimbursement challenges will continue to emerge, the workgroup's commitment to collaboration, education, and advocacy ensures that Illinois providers have a trusted forum for addressing issues and improving outcomes for the patients and families they serve.

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne



The work of the IL-HPCO Government Affairs Committee focuses on ensuring the people shaping Illinois and national health policy understand what's at stake for patients facing serious illness and the caregivers who support them, including hospice providers and clinicians. Whether it's a state agency building a new resource, a workgroup drafting the next decade's aging strategy, or federal regulators rethinking oversight, IL-HPCO wants to be at the table, making sure hospice and palliative care's perspective, and the needs of the families we serve, are part of the conversation.

Helping Build a Statewide Caregiver Portal
One promising effort underway is the Illinois Department on Aging's (IDoA) Caregiver Portal, a planned single online hub where family caregivers across the state can find information, health guidance, and respite resources in one place. The portal is being developed as part of EngAging Illinois, the state's new ten-year Multisector Plan for Aging, in partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago.

IL-HPCO board members Shelly Cartright (Apex Hospice & Palliative Care) and Ellen Byrne are participating in this process, serving on the Caregivers workgroup to make sure the portal reflects the realities of caring for someone with a serious or terminal illness not just the needs of caregivers supporting general aging-related care. For families navigating decisions about hospice, palliative care or advance care planning, the right information at the right moment can ease an already difficult time. By staying engaged with IDoA and UIC as the portal takes shape, IL-HPCO is working to ensure that hospice and palliative care resources, respite options, and disease-specific guidance are built into the portal from the start so it serves as a genuinely useful tool for the caregivers your organizations support every day.

A Seat at the Table for "Ensuring Health for All Ages"
IL-HPCO is also represented on the EngAging Illinois workgroup for the Ensuring Health for All Ages focus area. Mary Kay Sheehan and Kayce Riordan of Lightways, along with Ellen Byrne, are participating in twice-monthly meetings continuing through next year. The focus area's strategies align closely with hospice and palliative care, and several workgroup leaders are geriatricians certified in palliative medicine. Priorities include coordinated care, culturally attuned healthcare access, workforce development (the "4Ms" of age-friendly care (What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility), public awareness of aging, and the state's Brain Health initiative. This is a meaningful chance to shape policy that benefits both providers and the patients and families who depend on coordinated care as illness progresses.

A Pivotal Moment: Setting New Policy Priorities
Hospice providers are operating in an unusually complicated environment right now at both the federal and state level and the Government Affairs Committee is using this moment to develop a fresh set of policy priorities to guide IL-HPCO's advocacy going forward.

Federal Landscape. In May 2026, CMS imposed a nationwide, six-month moratorium on new Medicare enrollment for hospices and home health agencies, part of a broader federal crackdown on fraud, waste, and abuse in these program areas. Alongside the moratorium, CMS has signaled it will roll out a public hospice scoring system and step up enrollment screening and claims review. For a field built on trust and relationships at a family's most vulnerable moment, demonstrating quality and program integrity has never mattered more, and IL-HPCO is working to make sure new requirements distinguish good actors from bad ones without creating barriers to care for patients who need it.

State landscape. Illinois enters this same period with two major state-level developments. First, medical aid in dying will become available to qualifying terminally ill adults under the End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act ("Deb's Law"), effective September 12, 2026. As this option becomes part of the end-of-life landscape in Illinois, IL-HPCO is focused on making sure providers understand the nuances involved in effectively delivering on the core mission of comfort, dignity, and expert symptom management alongside this new end-of-life option. Second, IL-HPCO sees a real opportunity to advance a Medicaid palliative care benefit potentially through a model contract with Medicaid managed care and Medicare Advantage plans that would extend palliative support to more Illinoisans earlier in a serious illness, before hospice eligibility, when that support can do the most good.

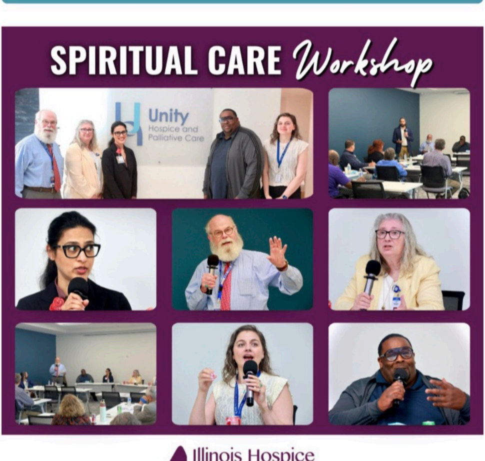
Taken together, these federal and state shifts are exactly why the Government Affairs Committee is revisiting its policy priorities this year, with a focus on program integrity, palliative care access, workforce, and caregiver support. This is precisely the work a statewide association exists to do: translate fast-moving federal and state changes into a coordinated, patient-centered voice for the field, so no single provider has to navigate it alone. Committee members and interested member organizations are encouraged to weigh in as these priorities take shape — contact Ellen Byrne at ebyrne@il-hpco.org.

The Government Affairs Committee meets monthly and welcomes member input. Contact Ellen Byrne, Director of Policy & Government Affairs, at ebyrne@il-hpco.org.

Join us! July 23: Music Therapy Workshop

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Register



Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Register

May 2026: Spiritual Care Workshop

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

June 2026: Summer Regional Meeting

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Sponsored by: McKESSON

POLST Illinois

DID YOU KNOW THAT POLST ILLINOIS SENDS OUT A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER?

This is a great way to stay on top of important information related to the POLST Model in Illinois, including:

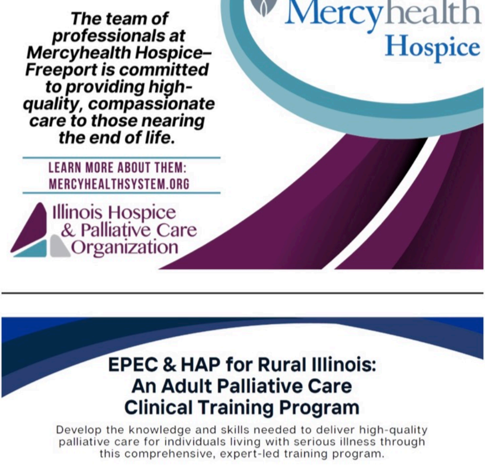
- Preparation for the 2027 POLST Registry
- Guidance & Best Practices
- Educational Resources
- IDPH Form Changes
- Case Studies for Challenging/Unique POLST Scenarios
- Methods to Improve POLST Quality

Sign up: polstil.org

POLST ILLINOIS — Practitioner Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment

POLST IL is a standing committee of the Illinois Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (IL-HPCO). The mission of the POLST Illinois Committee is to guide the development, acceptance, implementation, and evaluation of "Practitioner Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment" (POLST) as a vital component of advance care planning for Illinoisans, in accordance with Illinois statutes. For more information and resources, visit POLSTIL.org.

Quarter 1 Member Spotlights



EPEC & HAP for Rural Illinois: An Adult Palliative Care Clinical Training Program

Develop the knowledge and skills needed to deliver high-quality palliative care for individuals living with serious illness through this comprehensive, expert-led training program.

Presented by The HAP Foundation and the EPEC program through Northwestern University, this unique 12-month clinical training program is designed specifically for rural Illinois providers. Launching October 2, 2026 with a in-person conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield Illinois followed by monthly virtual training sessions, IL-HPCO is encouraging **nurse practitioners, physician assistants, registered nurses, social workers, community health workers, certified nursing assistants and emergency service personnel** to take part in this opportunity. A reduced rate is available due to generous donors. Palliative care and industry experts will be leading the curriculum with up to 24 CEUs available for nurses and social workers.

Register

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

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