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Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado

Happy New Year to Illinois hospice and palliative care providers, friends, and supporters!

2025 was a truly monumental year for IL-HPCO, and we are excited to look ahead to even greater engagement, education, advocacy, and networking opportunities in 2026.

On December 12, 2025, Governor Pritzker signed the long-anticipated *End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act*, making Illinois the 13th state to legalize what is commonly known as Medical Aid in Dying (MAID). In anticipation of this moment, IL-HPCO's leadership team and Board of Directors had been working diligently over the past two years to ensure that robust education and resources were ready and available for our member hospices.

Medical Aid in Dying will remain one of our top education and policy priorities over the next nine months, as the law is scheduled to take effect in September 2026. We have already provided written guidance and support via email and remain available to assist any hospice navigating the complexities of developing policies and procedures related to this new law.

Ellen Byrne has convened a working group of hospice leaders from across the state to provide operational and clinical guidance as we collaborate with state officials in the development of regulations to implement MAID. As advocates for high-quality hospice care, it is critical that we maintain a seat—and a strong voice—at the decision-making table as these rules and regulations take shape. IL-HPCO leadership is committed to keeping you informed as developments occur and to ensuring that all Illinois hospices have the tools and resources they need to understand the law and make decisions that align with their organizational missions and values. I look forward to supporting our members as we navigate this important journey together. Our provider community is stronger when we work together, and there is so much we can accomplish collectively.

I invite you to join us for our **first Regional Meeting of 2026** on **February 20 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at VITAS in Lombard.** This session will focus on Medical Aid in Dying and practical steps for preparation, led by me and my IL-HPCO colleagues, **Ellen Byrne and Katie Lord.** Additional details and registration information can be found below. This meeting is free for IL-HPCO members and $25 for non-members. We also plan to host at least two additional listening sessions on this topic across the state over the next six months—so stay tuned.

January marks our **annual membership drive.** Check out our accomplishments in 2025 and what we have planned for 2026. None of this work is possible without your support. To our members: **thank you** for your continued commitment to IL-HPCO. If your hospice is not yet a member, now is a great time to consider joining. Our member hospices receive invaluable information, guidance, and access to expertise—and we have exciting initiatives planned for 2026. Please feel free to reach out to me directly at **sdado@il-hpco.org** to learn more about getting involved.

We are also actively recruiting new members for our **Education Committee.** This dedicated and engaged group helps shape educational programming and delivery throughout the year. If this is an area of interest, please reach out to me or Katie for more information or to attend a meeting and see the work firsthand.

As we enter a new year, I am once again inspired by this remarkable community of hospice care providers and supporters across Illinois—professionals and clinicians dedicated to ensuring that all people have access to high-quality end-of-life care. I look forward to connecting with many of you throughout the year. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments.

Until then, stay warm—and remember, **less than 60 days until spring!**

Education Update from Katie Lord

As we begin a new year, I am so excited to reflect on the incredible momentum built throughout 2025 and to share what lies ahead for our education programming. Thanks to the engagement and dedication of our members, this past year was one of growth, innovation, and connection across Illinois hospice and palliative care.

In 2025, ILHPCO successfully hosted three Regional Meetings, a highly attended Annual Conference, and launched the ILHPCO Podcast, which is now available on all major podcast platforms. We also introduced a redesigned ILHPCO website, making it easier than ever for members to access education, resources, and advocacy updates. Throughout the year, our team delivered a variety of webinars and workshops, addressing timely clinical, regulatory, and interdisciplinary topics that directly impact hospice care delivery in Illinois.

Building on this success, our education focus in 2026 will emphasize *trying something new*. We are intentionally shifting toward local, discipline-focused workshops designed to meet the unique needs of each member of the hospice interdisciplinary team. By offering more targeted learning opportunities, we aim to ensure that nurses, social workers, chaplains, aides, leaders, and other hospice professionals receive the specialized support and training they need to provide the highest quality care to patients and families across Illinois.

We are pleased to kick off the year with our first Regional Meeting on February 20th, hosted at VITAS in Lombard. This meeting will focus on one of the most anticipated and evolving topics in our field: Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) implementation in Illinois. Attendees can expect thoughtful discussion, practical insights, and space for shared learning as hospices prepare for this important change in Illinois.

As always, member engagement drives the strength of ILHPCO's education programming. If you're interested in shaping future events, topics, and learning opportunities, we invite you to consider joining our Education Committee! Your expertise and perspective help ensure our education remains relevant, practical, and responsive to the needs of hospice professionals across the state. If you're interested in joining our dynamic committee, please send me an email at klord@il-hpco.org

We look forward to another year of collaboration, education, and innovation. Thank you for continuing to learn, lead, and grow with ILHPCO as we support hospice professionals and the vital work you do every day!

REGIONAL MEETING

Friday February 20, 2026, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. CT

VITAS

580 Waters Edge Lane Lombard, IL

Medical Aid in Dying - Steps to Prepare: A Conversation with IL-HPCO Leaders

Sara Dado
Executive Director

Ellen S. Byrne
Director of Policy & Government Affairs

Katie Lord
Education Coordinator

1.0 CEU for RN & SW | Lunch Provided | Register at IL-HPCO.org

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization | VITAS Healthcare

Register!

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne

Government Affairs Committee: Advancing Hospice and Palliative Care in 2026

The year ahead is shaping up to be a busy and important one for the Government Affairs Committee, and we're excited about the opportunities to advocate for hospice and palliative care across Illinois. From new legislation to hands-on advocacy and regulatory engagement, our work in 2026 will stay focused on protecting access to care, supporting the workforce, and helping our members navigate a changing policy landscape. Guided by our commitment to protect access to high-quality hospice and palliative care, the Committee will focus on the following key initiatives on behalf of our members and the patients and families they serve.

Legislative Priorities in the Illinois General Assembly – In partnership with our hospice champion, Representative Nicolle Grasse, three significant pieces of legislation will be introduced in 2026:

- **Hospice and Palliative Care Professional Student Loan Repayment Program:** This bill would help strengthen and stabilize the workforce by creating a student loan repayment program for hospice and palliative care professionals.
- **The Palliative Care and Quality of Life Act:** This legislation establishes minimum state standards for community-based palliative care services, helping ensure consistent access to high-quality care across Illinois.
- **Protection Against Violence for the Health Care at Home Workforce:** This bill seeks to enhance protections for hospice and other health care professionals who provide care in patients' homes, addressing growing safety concerns for the workforce.

Advocacy Day in Springfield – In March, the Government Affairs Committee will host an Advocacy Day at the Capitol, bringing member representatives to Springfield to meet with legislators face-to-face. This is a key opportunity to share the value of hospice, talk about challenges facing providers, and reinforce the need to protect access to hospice services for patients and families across the state.

Regulatory Engagement on Medical Aid in Dying – On behalf of our members, IL-HPCO will provide input to the Illinois Department of Public Health as it develops regulations to implement the Medical Aid in Dying law (SB 1950). We will also closely monitor policy decisions that affect hospices caring for patients who plan to utilize lethal medications at the end of life, and work to educate our providers on this critical transition in state policy, ensuring clarity, compliance, and patient-centered care.

Rural Health Care Transformation – The Committee will work with the Illinois Department of Health and Family Services to ensure the needs of seriously ill patients and their families are considered as the state develops its plan to distribute grant funding under the Rural Health Care Transformation Plan. This includes advocating for the inclusion of hospice providers and recognizing the essential role hospice plays in rural and underserved communities.

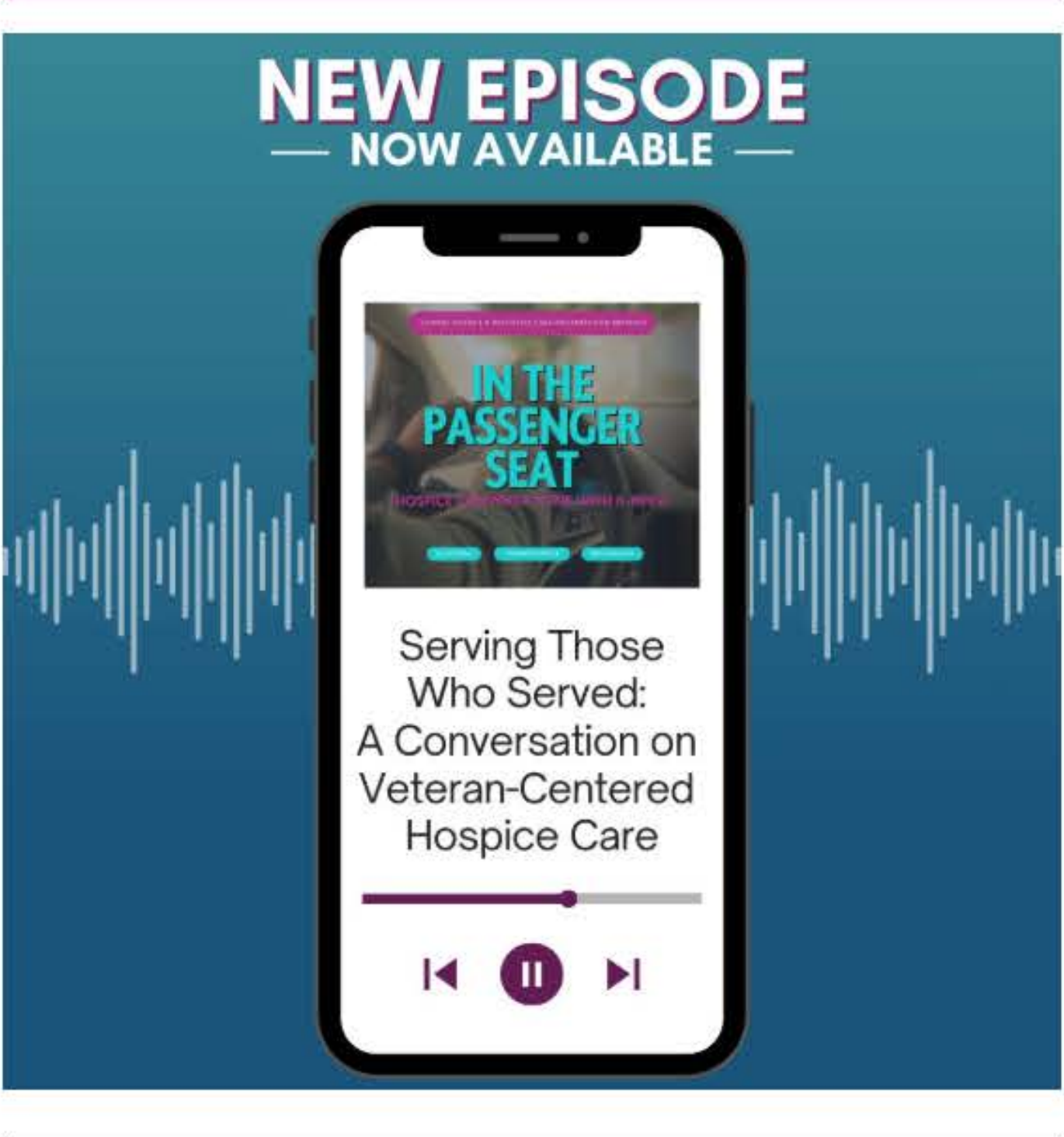
Pediatric Palliative Care Under Medicaid – As the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services rolls out the Pediatric Palliative Care program under Medicaid, we'll engage with HFS to support thoughtful implementation and ensure providers are prepared to serve children and families who can benefit from these services.

Eyes On the Federal Policy Landscape – Finally, the Government Affairs Committee will continue its longstanding role of monitoring federal legislation, regulations, executive orders, and oversight activities. Our goal remains the same: helping members deliver high-quality care while staying compliant today and prepared for what's ahead.

Together, these initiatives reflect our commitment to strong advocacy, thoughtful policy development, and collaboration with state and federal partners to advance hospice and palliative care across Illinois.

New Podcast Episodes Available

Tune in to new episodes of IL-HPCO's podcast "In the Passenger Seat: Hospice Conversations with IL-HPCO." Recently, we explored veteran care with Uplifted Care, advocacy efforts with Ellen Byrne, and ALS patients with the Les Turner ALS Foundation. Listen to the all the episodes on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other major streaming outlets.


NEW EPISODE
NOW AVAILABLE
IN THE PASSENGER SEAT
Serving Those Who Served: A Conversation on Veteran-Centered Hospice Care

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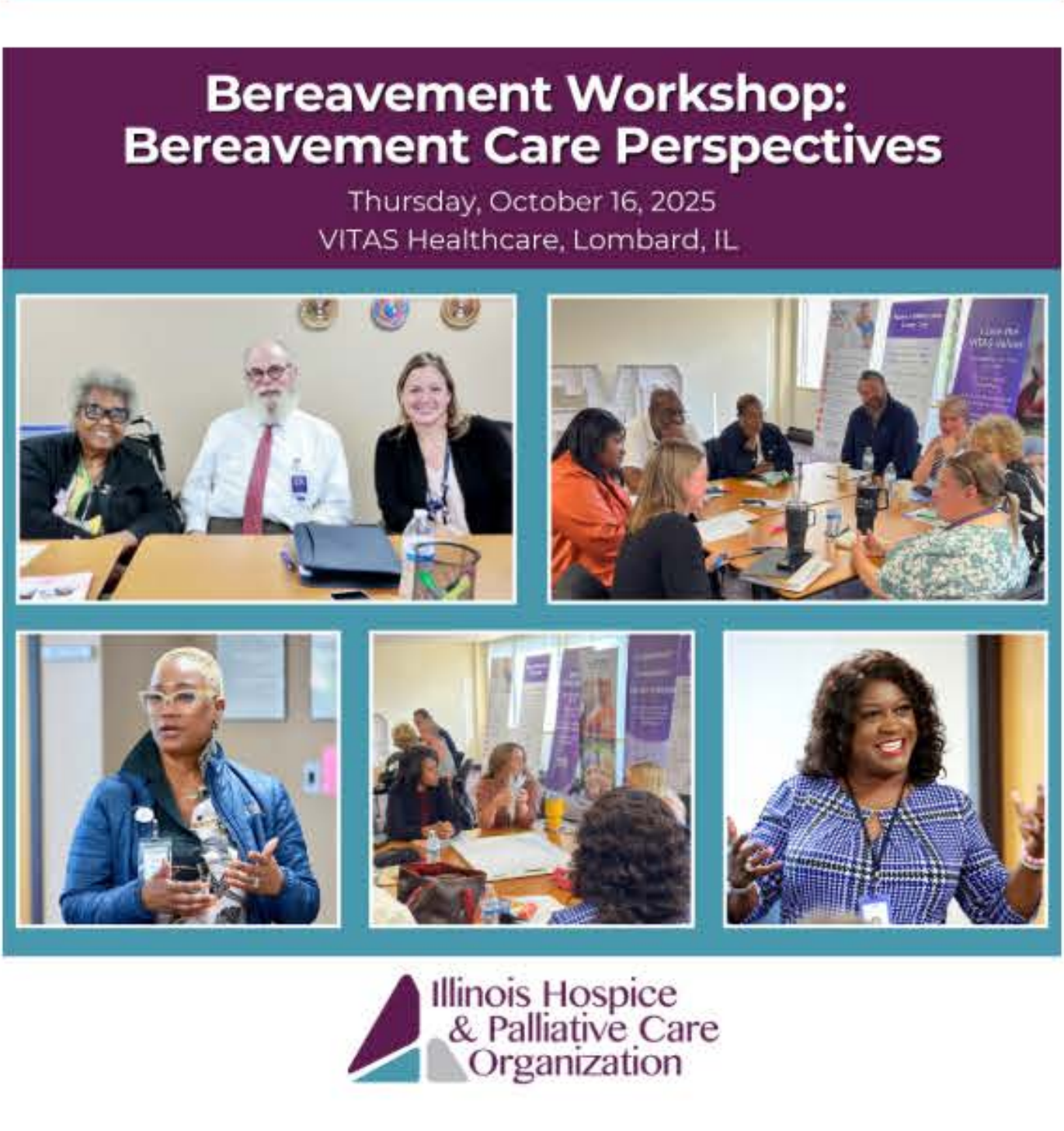
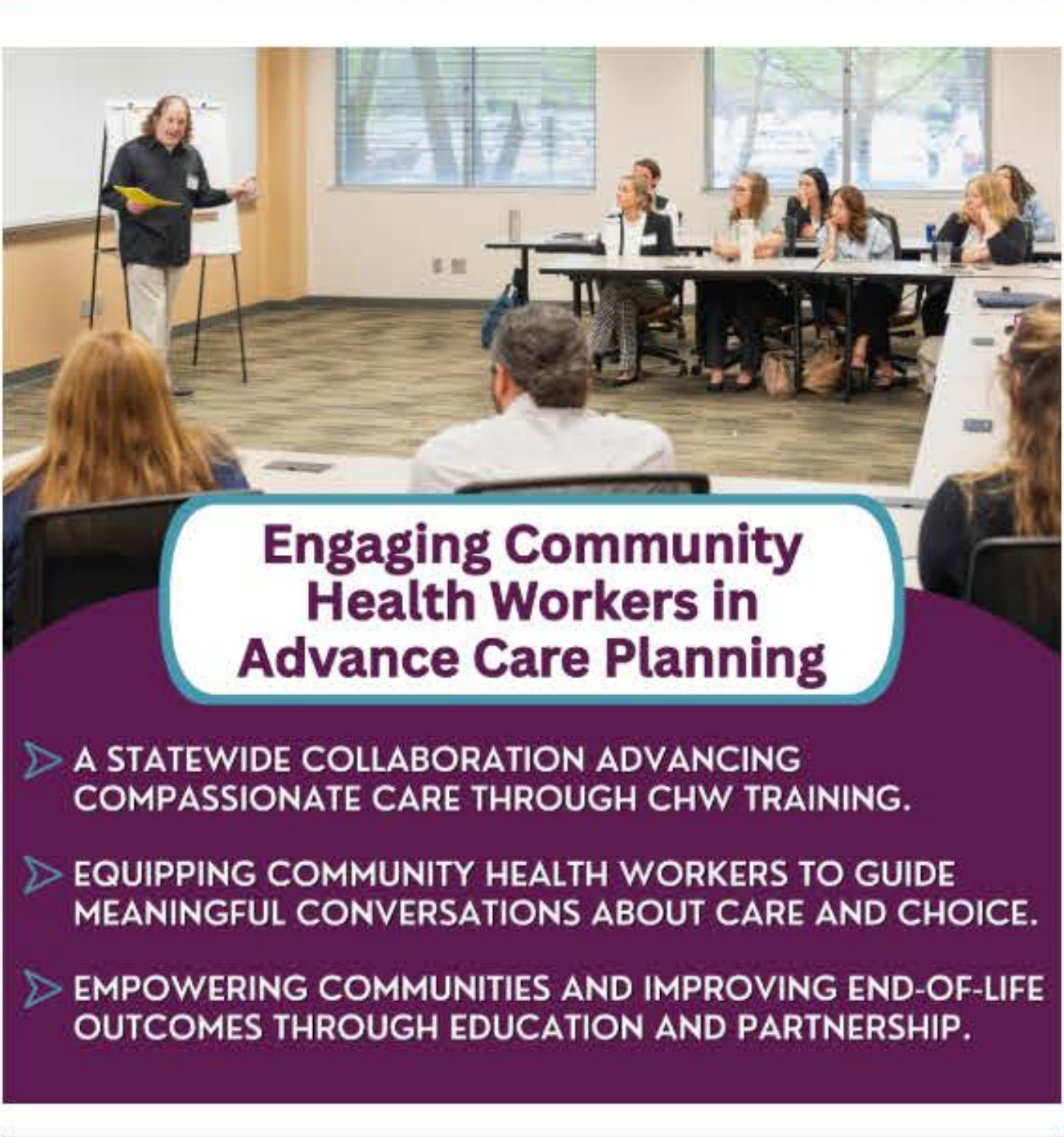
Oct. 16: Bereavement Workshop: Bereavement Care Perspectives


Bereavement Workshop: Bereavement Care Perspectives
Thursday, October 16, 2025
VITAS Healthcare, Lombard, IL
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Hospice News: IL-HPCO on Training CHWs on Advance Care Planning


Engaging Community Health Workers in Advance Care Planning
A STATEWIDE COLLABORATION ADVANCING COMPASSIONATE CARE THROUGH CHW TRAINING.
EQUIPPING COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS TO GUIDE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CARE AND CHOICE.
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING END-OF-LIFE OUTCOMES THROUGH EDUCATION AND PARTNERSHIP.

Our partnership with The HAP Foundation and Hospice Media is equipping CHWs to help patients understand their options and receive care aligned with their wishes at the end of life. Read the full article here.

Nov. 7: Fall Regional Meeting

Fall Regional Meeting
Integrated Palliative and Hospice Home Healthcare Services
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Quarter 4 Member Spotlights

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Delivering exceptional, personalized care for patients and ongoing support to their loved ones for more than 30 years.

Unity Hospice and Palliative Care is family owned and operated with locations in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Texas and Wisconsin.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
UNITYHOSPICE.COM

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Unity Hospice and Palliative Care.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Since 1981, Hospice of Southern Illinois has provided compassionate, comprehensive care to individuals and families across the region. What began as a small, community-rooted effort has grown into the oldest and one of the most trusted hospice programs in Southern Illinois.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
HOSPICE.ORG

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Hospice of Southern Illinois, Inc.

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Our mailing address is:
The HAP Foundation
c/o IL-HPCO Executive Director
18W140 Butterfield Road, Suite 1120
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181-4848

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