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Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization
Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado

Happy Spring, IL-HPCO friends and supporters,

What a busy and exciting few months it has been! We had an incredible Advocacy Day in Springfield on April 14. Thank you to this year's dedicated advocates who spent the day sharing their expertise, passion, and commitment to hospice care with our state lawmakers. A highlight of the day was receiving a formal "shout out" in the House Chamber during a live legislative session—an exciting and meaningful moment for our community.

I am truly grateful for the many opportunities created through the hard work and dedication of so many. Please know that your voices are being heard. We will continue to advocate for the needs of hospice providers, patients, and families across Illinois. Our mission remains clear: to ensure that high-quality end-of-life care is accessible to all.

You may notice someone missing from this quarter's newsletter—Education Coordinator Katie Lord. Katie is currently at home, resting and eagerly awaiting the arrival of a new baby Lord! We wish her all the best and look forward to welcoming her back next quarter with more exciting updates.

In the meantime, I am proud to share IL-HPCO's 2026 education plans and calendar. The best way to describe this plan is simple: *you spoke, and we listened.*

Feedback from recent years has made it clear that full-day events are becoming increasingly difficult for hospice clinicians to attend. Higher caseloads, travel constraints, and tighter budgets all present real challenges. While the content has been valued, the logistics can be demanding. We also heard a strong desire for more discipline-specific training and smaller, workshop-style events that allow for deeper, more focused learning. Additionally, there is a clear need for us to bring education and networking opportunities closer to you—across all regions of the state—to improve accessibility.

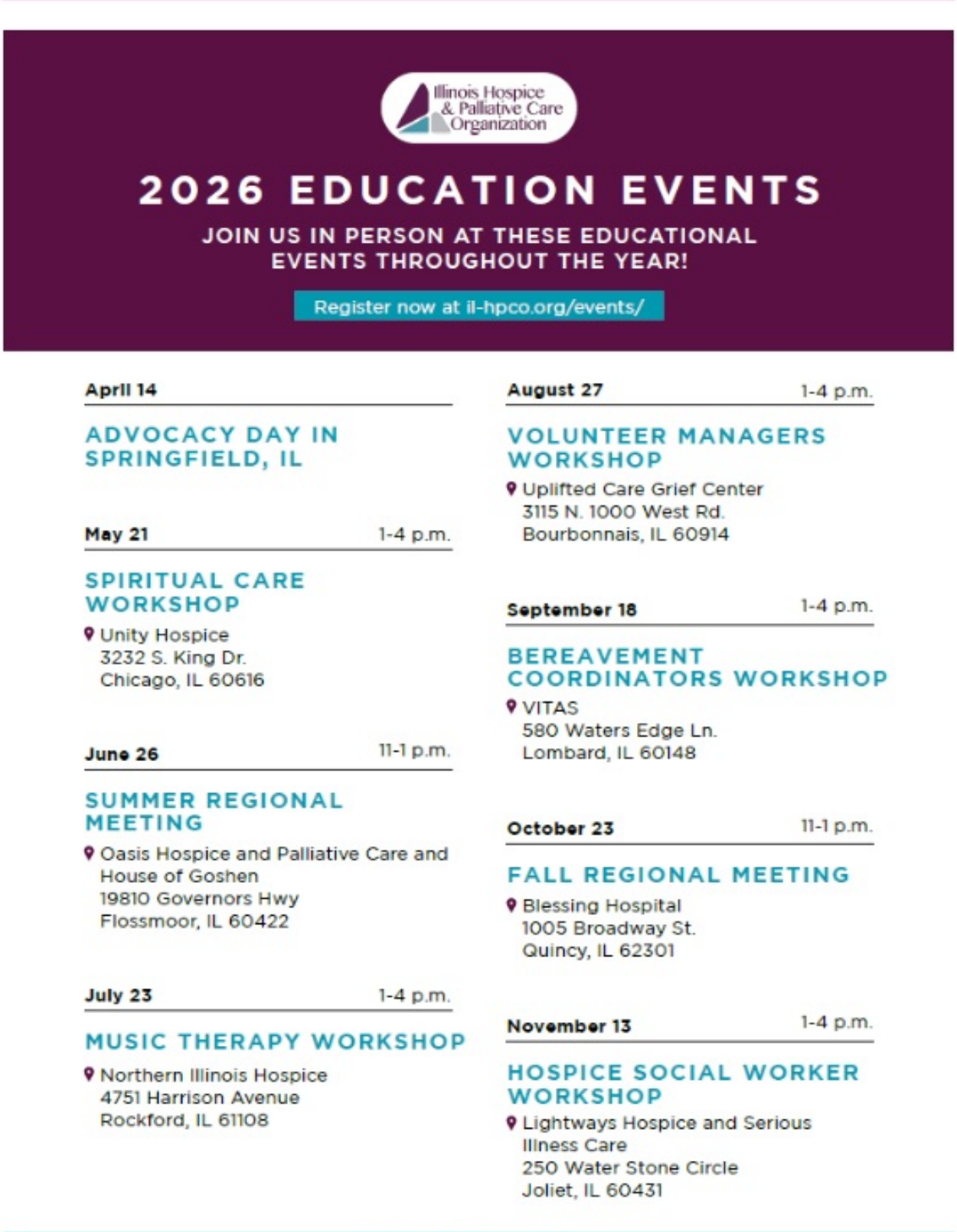
Last year, we began piloting these ideas by offering a workshop for bereavement professionals, a three-hour CEU course for social workers, and a series of small regional meetings. These events provided valuable opportunities for connection, collaboration, and shared learning—and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Building on that success, our Education Committee has developed a robust and flexible calendar of events for 2026. We are confident there will be something for everyone, with meaningful opportunities to learn, connect, and grow across all corners of Illinois. We will also continue to add webinars and virtual sessions throughout the year as new topics and needs emerge.

More information about these events is available on our website at www.il-hpco.org. I encourage you to explore the offerings and share them with your teams.

As always, we are stronger together. Thank you for your continued commitment to improving care for patients and families across our state.

It is an honor to serve in this role. Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, ideas, or feedback—I would love to hear from you. I look forward to seeing you at an event or training this year.



2026 EDUCATION EVENTS

JOIN US IN PERSON AT THESE EDUCATIONAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR!

Register now at il-hpco.org/events/

April 14
ADVOCACY DAY IN SPRINGFIELD, IL

May 21 1-4 p.m.
SPIRITUAL CARE WORKSHOP
Unity Hospice
3232 S. King Dr.
Chicago, IL 60616

June 26 11-1 p.m.
SUMMER REGIONAL MEETING
Oasis Hospice and Palliative Care and House of Goshen
19810 Governors Hwy
Flossmoor, IL 60422

July 23 1-4 p.m.
MUSIC THERAPY WORKSHOP
Northern Illinois Hospice
4751 Harrison Avenue
Rockford, IL 61108

August 27 1-4 p.m.
VOLUNTEER MANAGERS WORKSHOP
Uplifted Care Grief Center
3115 N. 1000 West Rd.
Bourbonnais, IL 60914

September 18 1-4 p.m.
BEREAVEMENT COORDINATORS WORKSHOP
VITAS
580 Waters Edge Ln.
Lombard, IL 60148

October 23 11-1 p.m.
FALL REGIONAL MEETING
Blessing Hospital
1005 Broadway St.
Quincy, IL 62301

November 13 1-4 p.m.
HOSPICE SOCIAL WORKER WORKSHOP
Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care
250 Water Stone Circle
Joliet, IL 60431

https://il-hpco.org/

Register here!

Letter from Co-chair Fawn Hendershott

I serve as the Executive Director of UpliftedCare and am honored to be Co-Chair of the Illinois Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (IL-HPCO) Board. I've been in hospice and palliative care for over 10 years, starting as a nurse case manager, and have built my career around this work. I truly love what hospice represents and believe deeply that everyone deserves quality end-of-life care and dignity in their final chapter.

My involvement with IL-HPCO comes from that same passion. The work the organization does is incredibly meaningful to our industry, and I'm proud to be part of it. Especially during a time when there is so much change and complexity in healthcare, IL-HPCO plays an important role in supporting providers and helping guide the future of hospice and palliative care in Illinois. I'm looking forward to the year ahead—supporting our members, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to move this important work forward.

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne

Your Voice for Hospice & Palliative Care Policy: Government Affairs Update
The IL-HPCO Government Affairs Committee has had an active start to 2026, working on multiple fronts to advance policies that support hospice and palliative care patients, families, and providers across Illinois. From the halls of the General Assembly to statewide aging policy working groups, your association is at the table — making sure the hospice and palliative care perspective is heard. Here is a look at what the committee has been working on this spring.

Testifying for Our Workforce: HB 4452 Before the House Appropriations Committee
On March 20, 2026, IL-HPCO Director of Policy & Government Affairs Ellen Byrne along with bill sponsor Representative Nicolle Grasse (a 34-year hospice chaplain with IL-HPCO member, VITAS) delivered testimony before the Illinois House Appropriations – Higher Education Committee in support of HB 4452, the Hospice & Palliative Professional Student Loan Repayment Act. This bill would create a state loan repayment program targeted at nurses, social workers, advance practice registered nurses and physicians choosing careers at an Illinois licensed and Medicare certified hospice.

In her testimony, Ellen outlined the unique financial constraints facing hospice providers — including the fact that more than 90% of hospice revenue comes from a fixed Medicare daily rate that has grown an average of only 3% over the last four fiscal years, even as labor, medication, and transportation costs have risen sharply. Unlike hospitals, hospice organizations cannot raise prices to fund competitive wages or recruitment incentives. Workforce recruitment and retention, the testimony noted, remains the single greatest challenge facing hospice providers today.

The testimony also highlighted the connection between workforce investment, patient outcomes and health system efficiency, noting that hospice staffing shortages mean patients may remain hospitalized longer than needed or face delays in enrollment which leads to low-value care at the end of life.

We will keep members informed as HB 4452 moves through the legislative process. If you have not yet contacted your state representative asking them to support HB4452, please do so today.

Shaping Illinois' Blueprint for Aging: EngAging Illinois
IL-HPCO is actively participating in the implementation of EngAging Illinois — the state's 10-year Multisector Plan for Aging established under Executive Order 2024-02. This statewide blueprint brings together government agencies, community organizations, health systems, and the private sector to create a more age-forward Illinois, addressing not just health care but also housing, transportation, economic opportunity, and caregiving.

Ellen Byrne is serving on two working groups that directly intersect with the work our members do every day:

- Health Focus Area Working Group — This group is addressing how the health care system can better serve Illinois' aging population, with an emphasis on access, equity, and the integration of community-based and home-based care. The hospice and palliative care perspective is a vital and underrepresented voice in this conversation.
- Caregiving Focus Area Working Group — Caregivers — both paid and unpaid — are central to the delivery of hospice and palliative care. This group is working on strengthening caregiver supports, coordinating training across home and community-based service systems, and connecting caregivers to resources through the Illinois Department on Aging's portal.

IL-HPCO's engagement in these working groups ensures that end-of-life care, serious illness support, and the needs of hospice providers and their patients are reflected in the policies and actions that flow from this plan. As EngAging Illinois continues to move from planning to implementation, there may be opportunities for member organizations to engage as well — stay tuned for more information.

Looking Ahead: Refreshing IL-HPCO's Policy Priorities
In addition to the active legislative agenda this session, the Government Affairs Committee has begun an important longer-term project: refreshing and updating IL-HPCO's policy priorities. The committee will be reviewing past priorities and brainstorming new directions to ensure that IL-HPCO's advocacy agenda reflects the most pressing needs facing Illinois hospice and palliative care providers, patients, and families today.

Among the potential policy priority areas under consideration are:

- Preventing fraudulent hospice enrollment and protecting the integrity of the Medicare hospice benefit
- Supporting resource conservation and access in rural and critical access communities
- Increasing hospice length of stay through better access and earlier referrals
- Ensuring patients and caregivers have the knowledge and resources they need to plan for and cope with serious illness
- Promoting access to value-focused, community-based palliative care models

The committee plans to continue this conversation at upcoming meetings, with discussion of how to best engage experts and stakeholders in shaping a forward-looking agenda. If you have ideas or priorities you would like to see reflected in IL-HPCO's policy platform, please reach out to Ellen Byrne or your organization's representative on the Government Affairs Committee.

Questions? Contact the Government Affairs Committee
For more information on any of the issues covered in this update, or to get involved in IL-HPCO's advocacy efforts, please contact:

Ellen Byrne, Director of Policy & Government Affairs
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization
ebyrne@il-hpco.org

Diane Slezak, CEO of Age Options, Representative Nicolle Grasse of the 53rd District, Arlington Heights and Ellen Byrne, IL-HPCO are pictured here.

Join us! May 21: Spiritual Care Workshop

SPIRITUAL CARE Workshop
MAY 21, 2026
UNITY HOSPICE
LEARN FROM A PANEL OF EXPERIENCED HOSPICE CHAPLAINS FROM THE ACROSS THE STATE IN THIS INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP.

Register now!

Learn from a panel of experienced hospice chaplains from the across the state.

Moderated by Rev Joe Green– Corporate Director of Spiritual Care and Bereavement at Unity Hospice and Palliative Care

Panelists: Carol Harrington – Spiritual Care Counseling at Residential Hospice, Alpacino Taylor – Chaplain at Transitions Care, Jennine Groene – Chaplain at Uplifted Care and Amy Aschliman – MDiv and BCC, board certified chaplain.

We will share best practices, ways to improve communication and overcome objections within the interdisciplinary team and with patients and families, ideas on improving hospice CAHPS scores through the use of increased spiritual care services. Meet and network with spiritual care professionals working in hospice across the state. This will be an interactive workshop with time for all participants to learn and share. Lights snacks and refreshments will be served.

Feb. 20: Winter Regional Meeting

REGIONAL MEETING

Our February Regional Meeting hosted at VITAS Healthcare was a powerful example of what happens when our community comes together to learn and lead. From policy insights to practical preparation strategies, the discussion around Medical Aid in Dying provided valuable perspectives for hospice and palliative care teams across Illinois. A special thank you to our sponsor The HAP Foundation. We're proud to create space for conversations that matter.

2026 Advocacy Day

2026 IL-HPCO ADVOCACY DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

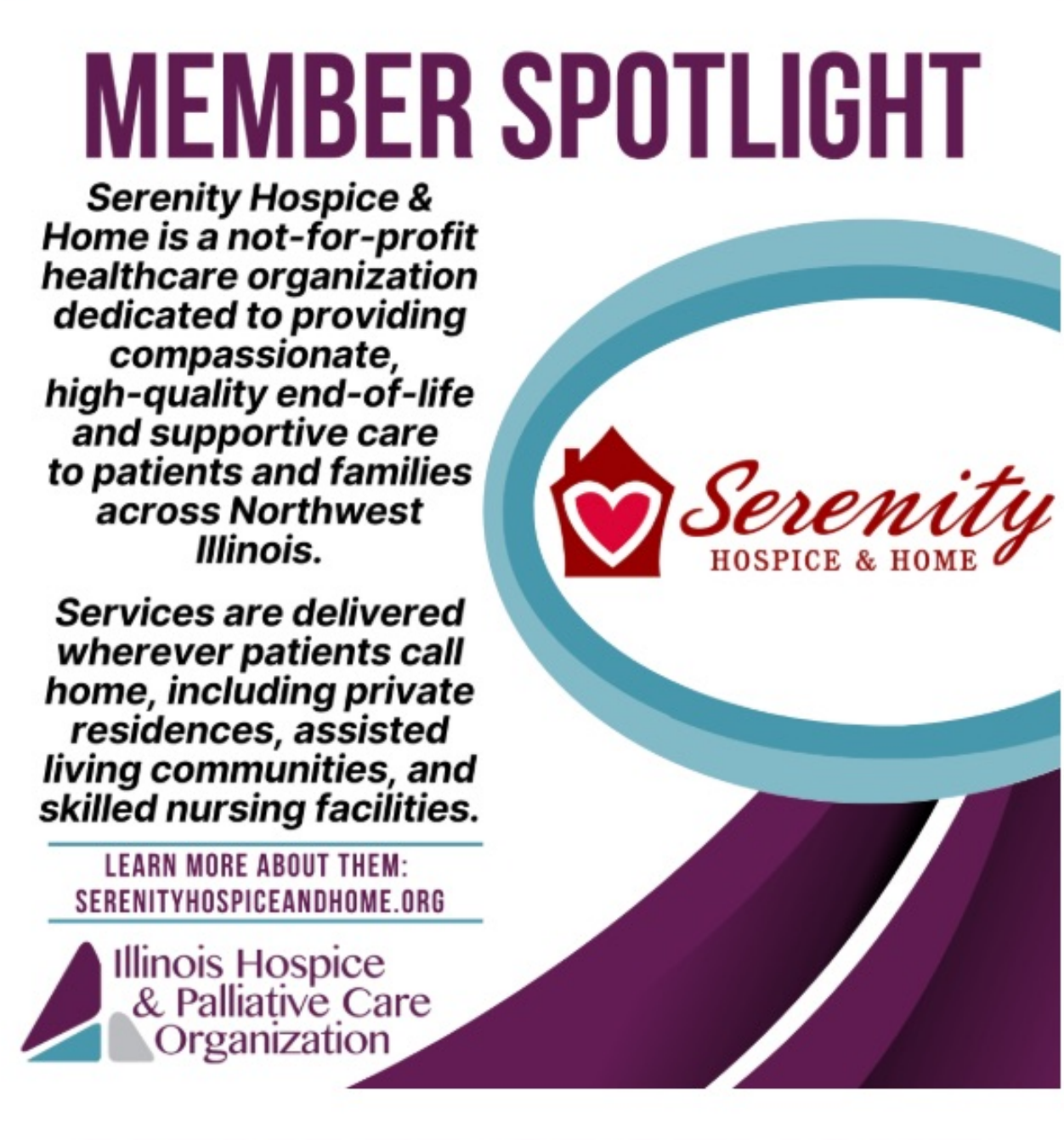
Thank you to everyone who joined us in Springfield for IL-HPCO Advocacy Day! Hospice and palliative care professionals from across Illinois came together to meet with legislators and staff, sharing their voices to support policies that protect access to high-quality, compassionate care.

From meaningful conversations to powerful storytelling, the day was a reminder of what we can accomplish when we advocate together. Your passion and commitment are helping shape the future of hospice and palliative care across our state.

POLST Illinois

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

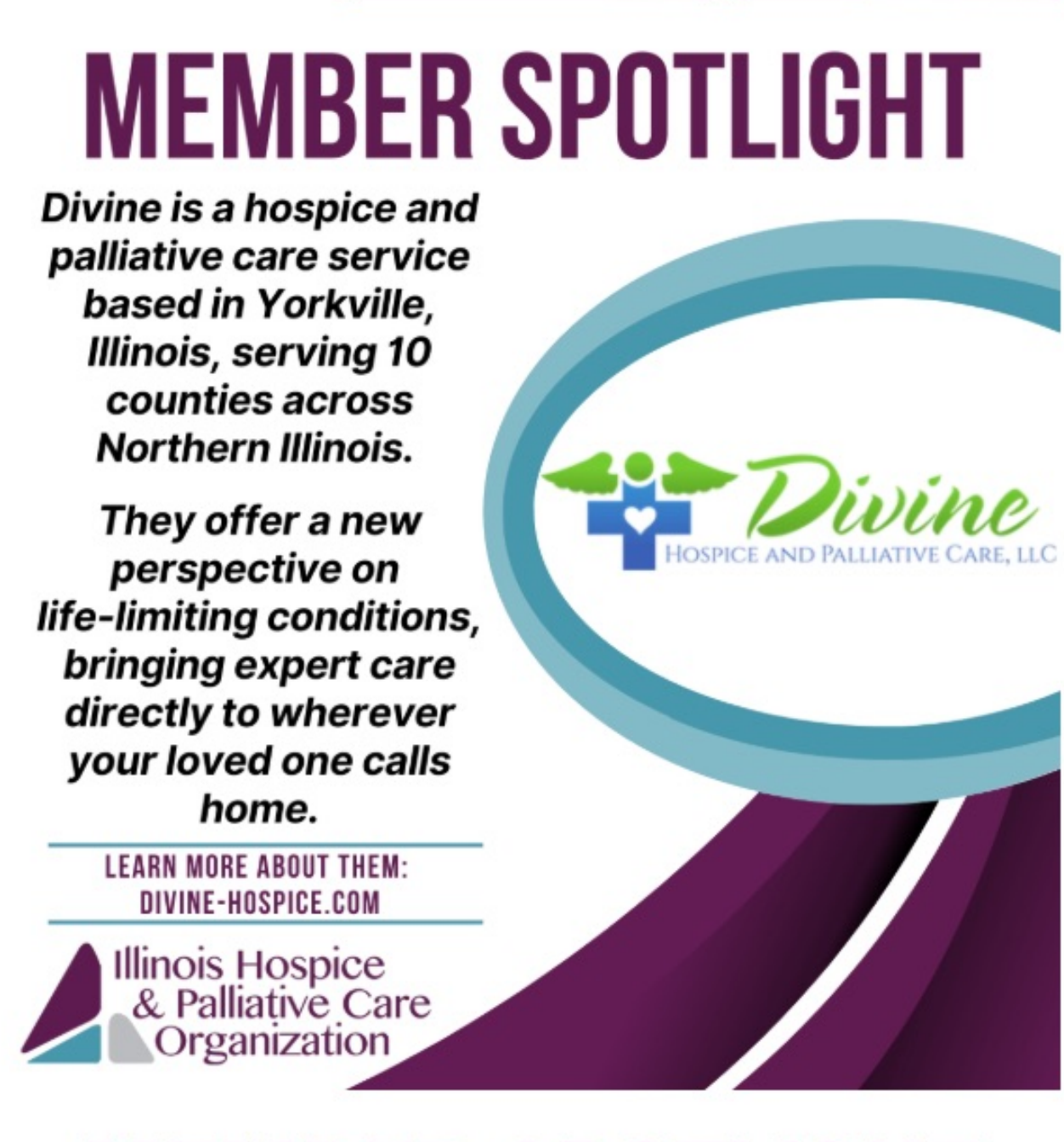


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Serenity Hospice & Home is a not-for-profit healthcare organization dedicated to providing compassionate, high-quality end-of-life and supportive care to patients and families across Northwest Illinois.

Services are delivered wherever patients call home, including private residences, assisted living communities, and skilled nursing facilities.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
SERENITYHOSPICEANDHOME.ORG

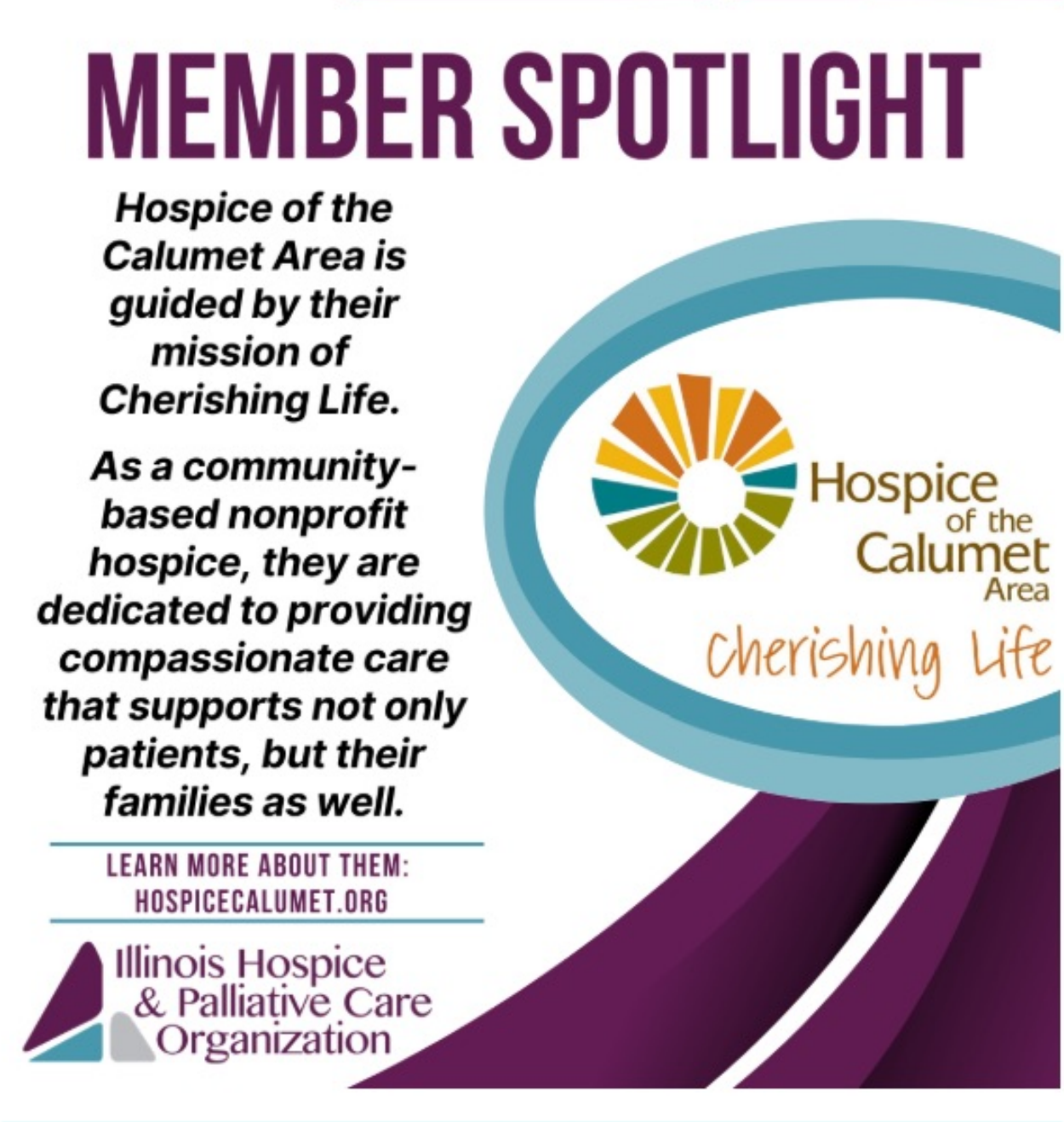


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Divine is a hospice and palliative care service based in Yorkville, Illinois, serving 10 counties across Northern Illinois.

They offer a new perspective on life-limiting conditions, bringing expert care directly to wherever your loved one calls home.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
DIVINE-HOSPICE.COM



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Hospice of the Calumet Area is guided by their mission of Cherishing Life.

As a community-based nonprofit hospice, they are dedicated to providing compassionate care that supports not only patients, but their families as well.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
HOSPICECALUMET.ORG

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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