The Importance of Local Engagement: Why Franchises, Systems-Based Agencies and National Companies Need the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care

By: Naomi Cotrone, Vice President

As the Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care and the owner of Nash Corp. d.b.a. Right at Home, a statewide franchise of Right at Home, I want to address a critical topic: the importance of franchises, systems-based agencies and national companies actively participating in our association. While many of these organizations bring a wealth of resources and operational expertise, one key area often overlooked is the need for localized regulatory and legislative knowledge, education and advocacy. This is where our association steps in to bridge the gap and ensure that our members are fully equipped to succeed.

Hospitals and long-term care systems, franchises and national organizations in the home care industry typically provide robust corporate training, marketing strategies and operational systems and supports. However, they often fall short in addressing the unique challenges and nuances of state and local regulations and legislation. In Rhode Island, we face constantly evolving labor laws, healthcare regulations and payor system changes that directly impact how home care, home health and hospice services are delivered. Without a clear understanding of these dynamics, these type of providers are at greater risk for noncompliance, operational inefficiencies and missed opportunities to optimize care for patients and clients. Under new public reporting measures, we will be able to learn which companies have deficiencies or are inadvertently deemed to provide substandard care because their administrators are updated properly with the latest information, regulations or policies.

The Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care fills this critical void. Our association serves as the go-to resource for up-to-date federal, state and local regulatory and legislative information, ensuring that our members remain informed and compliant. We work tirelessly to advocate on behalf of the home care industry at the state and federal levels, representing the unique needs of Rhode Island's home care providers and their patients, clients, staff and families.
Participation in our association offers a range of tangible benefits, including:

Localized Expertise: Members gain access to timely information about Rhode Island's ever-changing labor laws, licensure requirements, and payer policies, allowing them to navigate the complexities of operating in our state with confidence.

Educational Opportunities: Our association provides tailored education programs, workshops, and resources designed specifically for home care providers in Rhode Island. These offerings address the unique challenges we face and equip members with tools to adapt to regulatory shifts and industry trends.

Advocacy for Your Business: Through our proactive engagement with policymakers and regulators, we ensure that your voice is heard. Our advocacy efforts work to protect and enhance the home care industry, enabling our members to focus on delivering quality care while we champion their interests.

Financial Advantages: Membership in the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care positions your agency for financial success. By staying informed and compliant, your business can avoid costly penalties, improve operational efficiency and leverage incentive payment models developed through our collaborative partnerships with commercial insurers.

Franchises, systems-based agencies and national companies that join the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care are not just investing in their own success—they are contributing to the advancement of the entire home care industry in Rhode Island. Together, we can create a stronger, more unified voice that drives positive change and delivers better outcomes for the patients and clients that each of us serve.

I am proud to operate my franchise with the support and assistance from the Rhode Island Partnership for Home. As such, I am a leading voice for our industry and am enabled to speak on behalf of the needs and benefits of our industry. I encourage every franchise, systems-based agency and national company operating in Rhode Island to take full advantage of what our association offers. Your participation is not just important—it's essential.

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WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER

Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care

Advancing quality healthcare at home

Home Care Industry Impact

Navigating the Road Ahead with Optimism

new year update

By: Bethany Skinner, President

It is with immense gratitude and enthusiasm to serve as the 2025-2026 President of the Board of Directors for the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care. As the Chief Executive Officer of Health Care Services, a personal care and homemaking services company that has proudly served Rhode Islanders for 53 years, I have witnessed firsthand the vital role that home care plays in the lives of so many Rhode Islanders. My company was founded by my father, Robert Haigh, in 1972 before I was born. Before he passed away almost four years ago, I not only learned about the business, I gained his passion for providing quality care to our community in their most vulnerable time of life. This is why I am honored to bring this experience to my elected position as President working alongside each of the association's members in advancing our shared mission.

I acknowledge the incredible leadership of my predecessor, Cheryl Levesque, Executive Director for Patient Care Services at HomeCare Advantage, a Medicare-certified skilled home health and personal care services company. Cheryl's unwavering dedication over her term as President has strengthened our association in so many ways, particularly through her work to enhance partnerships with commercial health insurance plans. These collaborations have laid the groundwork for developing preferred networks and quality-based incentive payment models that directly benefit our Provider Members. I am committed to building on her accomplishments and ensuring that these initiatives not only come to fruition, but subsequently thrive.

Additionally, I am inspired by the efforts of our longstanding Executive Director, Nicholas Oliver, MPA, CAE, whose leadership has continually expanded the benefits available to our members. From cost-saving programs to time-saving tools, Nicholas has ensured that our association remains at the forefront of innovation and value for our members, staff, patients, clients and families. As President, I will work to further expand these offerings while also fostering inclusivity for our valued vendor partners, our Associate Members, who are integral to the success of our association.

One of my top priorities as President is to strengthen our collaboration with federal and state regulatory agencies, as well as the national accrediting organizations. By working closely with these entities, we can provide timely and relevant education to our members on critical compliance measures, evolving clinical practices, survey readiness and patient-centered approaches to care. Together, we will modernize protocols and services to ensure that they meet the needs of today's patients and clients while positioning our members for long-term success.

As I embark on this new chapter, I want to thank each of you for placing your trust in my leadership. Your confidence inspires me to work tirelessly on your behalf. I am excited to partner with all of you—our Provider Members, Associate Members and stakeholders—to ensure that the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care continues to be a leader in the home care industry, advocating for the needs of our patients, workforce and businesses.

I look forward to hearing from you, learning from you and working with you to achieve our collective goals. Together, I am confident we will continue to strengthen and elevate our industry.

Advocating for Home Care: More than Just Preserving Medicaid Funding

By: Nicholas Oliver, MPA, CAE, Executive Director

The fight to secure the Medicaid cost inflation factor (CIF) for home care in the State Fiscal Year 2026 (SFY26) budget is not just about numbers on a balance sheet—it's about the future of Rhode Island's home care industry. The stakes are high and the impact of these decisions reaches far beyond Medicaid reimbursement rates. It influences commercial and private pay rates for both skilled and personal care services, affects the sustainability of home and community-based services and ultimately determines the quality of care our clients and patients receive.

Governor Daniel McKee (D-RI) and the Rhode Island General Assembly (state legislature) face a daunting road ahead to balance the state's next budget without significant cuts. Home and community-based services, including home care, are at risk of losing essential funding and the rates newly implemented in the current state budget. For those of us in the industry, this is not the time to stand by—it's the time to act!

Why the Medicaid CIF Matters

The Medicaid CIF is more than a line-item in the state budget. It ensures that home care providers can adjust their reimbursement rates to account for annual cost increases, such as rising wages, fuel costs and supplies. Without it, providers are left absorbing these costs, threatening their financial viability and ability to deliver quality care.

But the impact doesn't stop there. Medicaid rates often serve as a benchmark for commercial and private pay rates. If the CIF is cut, it creates a ripple effect, driving down rates across the board. This makes it harder to attract and retain skilled staff, jeopardizes care quality and places additional financial strain on families relying on private pay services. Plus, in recent years, fluctuations in Medicaid rates, especially proposed cuts, never mind implemented cuts, in each state have been discussed and factored for Medicare-contracted home health and hospice cuts recommended to the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC).

The Road Ahead

Governor McKee and state legislators are navigating a challenging fiscal landscape. While the economic climate demands tough choices, it's critical to remind them that cutting funding for home and community-based services is short-sighted. These services keep people out of expensive institutional care settings, saving the state money in the long-run and supporting the dignity and independence of Rhode Islanders.

Collective Advocacy Is Essential

Securing the CIF in SFY26 and protecting home care funding will not happen without a united front. We need collective advocacy at every level—from direct care and operations staff to administrators. Here's how we can make our voices heard:

1. **Engaging Direct Care and Operational Staff**: The stories of our caregivers and operational staff are powerful. They are the ones providing or ensuring critical services to clients every day. Their firsthand accounts can highlight the real-world impact of budget decisions. Encourage staff to share their experiences and participate in advocacy efforts.

2. **Administrator Participation:** Administrators must take an active role in meetings set by the association with key legislators. By demonstrating the financial and operational challenges providers face without adequate funding, we can make a compelling case for preserving the CIF.

3. **Storming the State House:** There is strength in numbers. We must mobilize our workforce, clients and families to attend hearings and advocate for home care funding. A strong presence at the State House sends a clear message to decision-makers: home care is essential and cuts, including pinning one or more community-based program or service such as home-delivered meals or senior centers against home care, is unacceptable.

A Call to Action

The path ahead will not be easy, but the stakes are too high to back down. By coming together as an industry, we can fight to preserve the Medicaid CIF and protect the future of home care and other vital community-based services that help keep vulnerable Rhode Islanders safe and supported in their home.

Let's make our voices heard! Engage your staff, participate in advocacy efforts and join us in storming the State House this legislative session. Together, we can ensure that Rhode Islanders will continue to have access to the quality home care services that they deserve.

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Governor McKee's SFY26 Budget Proposal: Impacts on Home Care Providers

By: Nicholas Oliver, MPA, CAE, Executive Director

On January 16, 2025, Governor Daniel McKee (D-RI) submitted his proposed State Fiscal Year 2026 (SFY26) budget to the Rhode Island General Assembly (state legislature). As outlined in House Bill 5076, the budget contains significant provisions in Article 8 that will impact home and community-based services (HCBS). Below are key highlights that home care providers should be aware:

Sunsetting the Medicaid Home Care Annual Rate Increase: The Governor proposes eliminating the annual Cost Inflation Factor (CIF), which has historically increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for home care providers to keep pace with inflation. Commonly referred to as a "cost-of-living adjustment" (COLA), this small annual increase is based on the U.S. Department of Labor's New England Consumer Price Index for medical care. While nursing homes are slated to receive a 2.3% CIF in this proposed budget, home care services would lose this adjustment. Governor McKee's rationale is to redirect funds to other community programs like senior centers and Meals on Wheels. The Governor's office points to the large rate increases approved for home care services in the current fiscal year, up to 30% for skilled nursing and therapeutic services and 75.5% for personal care and homemaking services, and argues that further adjustments will be addressed in biennial recommendations by the Rhode Island Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner (OHIC).

Discontinuation of Behavioral Health Training Program and Rate Enhancement: The budget does not allocate funding to continue the behavioral health training program through Rhode Island College's Institute for Education in Healthcare, nor the $0.39 per quarter-hour rate enhancement for Medicaid-contracted home care providers offering behavioral health services. This program has provided critical support to home care providers by enabling wage increases for participating paraprofessional employees. The Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care will file legislation to secure continued funding

for this program, which has proven to be cost-efficient for the State to keep eligible clients, within and outside of the Medicaid Program, in their home versus requiring facility-based care. Between January 2022 and December 2024, only $651,964 was expended for training and $120,000 was reimbursed to providers for the rate enhancement during the latter half of 2024.

Lack of Medicaid Rate Floor Policy: The proposed budget does not include a rate floor policy, which would set a minimum reimbursement rate for home care providers under Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs). Without this policy, commercial insurers participating in the upcoming CMS 1115 Demonstration State Health Plan (D-SHP) waiver could reimburse home care providers below the state's fee-for-service rates established by the General Assembly. This impacts home care, home health and hospice providers regardless of their payor sources as it has implications to commercial insurance contracts beyond the Medicaid Program. To protect providers, The Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care will advocate for legislation to establish a rate floor policy before the new waiver program launches.

Together, we can advocate for the funding and policies needed to sustain quality home care, home health and hospice services in Rhode Island. Members of the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care will receive more information, including Legislative Alerts at the appropriate times throughout this legislative session of the General Assembly, informing members to take action.

If your company is not yet a member, do not let your competitors speak for you, your patients and clients and your direct care and operations staff. Contact the Rhode Island Partnership for Home Care at (401) 351-1010 to learn how your company can grow and succeed through the benefit of membership!

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