Mills Administration Takes Steps to Support Nursing Homes in Response to COVID-19

March 26, 2020

Additional payments part of broader strategy to adapt policies to support Maine people

Governor Janet Mills and Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Jeanne Lambrew announced today a new measure helping the state's nursing facilities meet the financial challenges posed by COVID-19.

DHHS is providing additional payments through MaineCare to support nursing facilities' efforts related to infection control and visitor screening to protect workers and the residents in their care. Nursing facilities may request supplemental reimbursement through an "extraordinary circumstance allowance," which is available to help facilities address costs associated with unforeseen events outside of their control. DHHS has asked nursing facilities to track and submit costs beyond their normal operating expenses, such as:

- Staffing above and beyond customary levels necessary to maintain proper ratios and to monitor residents and screen visitors;
- Supplies and personal protective equipment, such as alcohol-based hand sanitizers, face masks, and gowns, beyond the amounts typically purchased.

Reimbursement requests will be considered for expenses starting March 1, 2020.

> *"We know COVID-19 poses a significant threat to older Mainers, like those who live in our state's nursing facilities, which is why my Administration is working closely with these facilities to do all we can to protect their residents,"said Governor Mills. "This new measure will financially support nursing facilities as they implement additional protections to ensure the health and safety of those they serve."*
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> *"This support for nursing facilities is just one part of our broader strategy to support medical, behavioral health, and long-term care providers during this rapidly evolving situation," said Commissioner Lambrew. "We're pursuing additional steps to support the health and wellbeing of Mainers who rely on DHHS programs and services."*

This new initiative comes as part of the Administration's ongoing work to adapt policies in response to the outbreak. Governor Mills has strongly urged long-term care facilities in Maine to prohibit all visitors and non-essential health care personnel, except for certain compassionate care circumstances such as an end of life situation, until further notice. DHHS continues to share with nursing facilities federal guidance about infection control and visitor screening to protect workers and the residents in their care.

This extraordinary circumstance allowance builds on the investment in nursing facilities through a cost-of-living increase in the biennial budget and other increases to their rates. The Mills Administration also successfully worked last fall to ensure that the State could increase funding for nursing home facilities without jeopardizing critical federal funding. As a result, MaineCare nursing facility rates will increase, on average, by 5 percent for Fiscal Year 2020 and facilities will receive another rate increase starting on July 1, 2020.

DHHS remains committed to partnering with all health and social services providers to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the people in their care. Among other investments, the revised supplemental budget passed by the Legislature on March 17 includes $15 million for payment rate increases to support direct health care providers who are caring for older Mainers, people with disabilities, and children and adults with behavioral health needs.

The Administration is also preparing to apply to the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for regulatory relief and alternative ways to support and deliver residential and other services for DHHS clients in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the Administration will swiftly implement federal funding for Maine people and providers newly available through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act signed into law last week, which includes support for Medicaid, paid sick leave, unemployment, food and nutrition programs, and testing for uninsured individuals, among other areas.

The Mills Administration continues to take action to ensure Maine people have access to needed benefits and services in response to COVID-19. Last week, DHHS announced steps to ensure access to health care, food, and basic necessities. Actions that DHHS is taking on COVID-19 can be found at:https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/coronavirus-resources.shtml.

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