Governor’s Proposal to Increase New York State Minimum Wage

In January, Governor Cuomo unveiled his $143.6 billion 2016-17 Executive Budget. Included within his Budget is a proposal to increase the State’s minimum wage from the current $9 per hour to $15 per hour.

Specifically, the Governor’s proposal would increase the minimum wage from $9 to $15 per hour by 12/31/18 for New York City ($10.50 on 7/1/16; $12.00 on 12/31/16; $13.50 on 12/31/17; and $15 on 12/31/18) and from $9 to $15 per hour by 7/1/21 for the rest of the State ($9.75 on 7/1/16; $10.75 on 12/31/16; $11.75 on 12/31/17; $12.75 on 12/31/18; $13.75 on 12/31/19; $14.50 on 12/31/20 and $15 on 7/1/21).

Overall, the Governor’s proposal amounts to a 67 percent increase in the State’s minimum wage, with an annual average increase of 16.8 percent in New York City and an annual average increase of 9.6 percent in the State’s remaining 57 counties.

A Rising Tide Does Not Lift All Boats

It’s been said that “a rising tide lifts all boats” with regard to increasing the minimum wage. Certain economists view this assertion as true for those businesses and employers who are able to pass increased labor costs through in higher prices for their products or services to the end consumer. However, this assertion is not true for the State’s Medicaid providers who provide essential long term care to New York’s most frail and infirm women, men and children.

This assertion is not true because there is one major problem: providers of long term care, and the patients we serve, are almost completely dependent on government programs for the payment of necessary care. As such, while other boats may be lifted with the tide, New York’s skilled nursing and assisted living providers are not able to pass through the added labor costs of an increase in the minimum wage as a consequence of being tethered to the “anchor” of Medicaid.

Our residents are often discharged from a hospital needing extensive care and rehabilitation. In addition to stroke patients, ventilator dependent residents, cancer patients, dementia patients, TBI patients and other high acuity patients, a majority of our residents need considerable assistance with their activities of daily living. Caring for our residents is a challenging privilege that requires training, expertise, patience and significant resources. NYSHFA/NYSCAL members perform this difficult work every day with dedication and compassion.

continued on next page
Governor’s Proposal…

continued from page 1

Medicaid Shortfall For Care

Presently, 76 percent of all nursing home residents in New York rely on Medicaid to pay for their care. At $48.43 per patient per day, New York unfortunately has the Nation’s second largest shortfall between Medicaid payment rates and what it costs to provide necessary patient care. This care includes, among other things, room, 24-hour nursing services, at least 3 meals with special requirements, medication, therapy, and many other special services and activities. Moreover, there are significant additional costs associated with wage differentials paid at nursing homes and assisted living facilities to provide necessary care for evening, night and weekend shifts, to name just a few.

Consequently, nursing home and assisted living providers face a unique and difficult position: first we cannot simply raise the price of our services to reflect higher labor costs due to an increase in the minimum wage. Second, we do not have the ability to change the makeup of our patient mix or shift costs to other residents. And third, we are not willing or able to reduce needed services or the quality of care we provide.

Minimum Wage Labor Cost Implications

Nursing home care is extremely labor intensive. In fact, labor costs represent 70 percent of all nursing home operating costs. As such, without full financial support from the State, the proposed minimum wage increase will have an unbearable economic impact on the State’s skilled nursing providers.

Working collaboratively with other statewide associations representing nursing homes, hospitals and home care providers, and utilizing the best currently available data, NYSHFA/NYSCAL conservatively estimates the Governor’s minimum wage proposal would increase costs for skilled nursing providers by $600 million and more than $50 million for assisted living providers.

These figures were established employing a methodology that considers three factors:

1. the direct impact of increasing the hourly wage of workers making below $15 per hour;

2. the impact of wage compression on labor costs, that is, wage increases in one set of wages within an organization necessitate increases in other, higher wage groups to maintain a level of wage differences; and

3. an increase in the indirect labor costs associated with mandatory benefits such as social security, workers’ compensation, and unemployment and disability insurance.

The State Must Provide Necessary Funding

Given the significant costs associated with the proposed minimum wage increase from $9 per hour to $15 per hour, coupled with the unique inability of skilled nursing and assisted living providers to raise the price of our services to absorb any mandated increase, NYSHFA/NYSCAL and its members are actively advocating for the State to fully fund the increased labor costs resulting from the implementation of a minimum wage increase.

The Governor’s proposed minimum wage increase places skilled nursing providers in a uniquely detrimental situation. We are dependent upon State and federal funding for payments of almost 90 percent of our residents. These payments already do not meet the cost of providing care at the State’s current minimum wage level.

As other states have done when increasing the minimum wage, New York must financially acknowledge the unique nature of skilled nursing and assisted living providers and fund this increase through a provider rate increase that is outside of the Medicaid Global Cap to ensure the continuation of access to high quality long term resident care.
February 29

Legislative Visitation Day
Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY

NYSHFA/NYSCAL will be holding a legislative visitation day on Monday, February 29 in Albany to meet with key elected officials and policymakers regarding issues and concerns related to the 2016-2017 Executive Budget.

Please contact Nancy Knapp at nknapp@nyshfa.org at your earliest convenience if you plan on attending.

March 31

NYSCAL Awards Programs Deadline

The New York State Center for Assisted Living (NYSCAL) is pleased to announce the NYSCAL Awards and Scholarship programs for 2016. The Awards program will recognize an administrator, nurse, and frontline caregiver for their work. In addition, NYSCAL will award one adult care/assisted living facility for their overall social and recreational programming during National Assisted Living Week. NYSCAL has mirrored this awards program after the National Center for Assisted Living’s (NCAL) Awards program. As a result, the NYSCAL winners will be nominated for the NCAL national awards. NYSCAL is also accepting nominations for the 2016 NYSCAL Volunteer of the Year Awards as well as the Nurse Scholarship application. All category winners will be honored at our annual convention’s awards banquet on June 28 at The Sagamore Resort in Bolton Landing, NY. All of the awards applications can be found on the NYSCAL website at http://www.nyscal.org.

March 31 – April 1

Social Service and Activities Conference
Holiday Inn, Saratoga Springs, NY

This conference, designed for SNF and ACF/AL social service staff, case managers and activities staff, will bring together presenters who will motivate and inspire. The program includes discussion on: Rethinking Elder Care; DOH Update for SNF’s and AL’s; Meeting the Challenges of a Younger Population; Advanced Care Planning; and Innovation in Activities and Volunteer Programs.

10.0 contact hours have been approved by SED’s State Board for Social Work for Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Licensed Master Social Workers and 10.0 contact hours for Activity Directors have been applied for through NCCAP and NAACP. For more information, visit http://www.nyshfa.org and click on Events/Education.
The Foundation for Quality Care (FQC) will implement a Long Term Care Customer Satisfaction and Quality Improvement Project, under a contract it received from NYS DOH using Civil and Monetary Penalties Law (CMP) funding. FQC will partner with National Research Corporation to implement the nationally recognized My InnerView customer satisfaction tool for 4,725 residents in 35 nursing homes over a two-year period.

The following 35 nursing homes were selected across the seven NYS DOH Regions:

Absolut Care of Aurora Park
Absolut Care of Eden
Absolut Care of Gasport
Absolut Care of Orchard Park
Albany County Nursing Home
Alpine Rehabilitation & Nursing Center
Andrus on Hudson
Bayberry Care Center
Briody Health Care Facility, LLC
Center for Nursing & Rehab
DeMay Living Center
Fairport Baptist Homes
Golden Hill Nursing & Rehabilitation Center
Guilderland Center Nursing Home and Rehab Center
Hilaire Rehabilitation Skilled Living & Nursing Care
Hillside Manor Rehabilitation and Extended Care Center
Kings Harbor Multicare Center
Kirkhaven

Maria Regina Residence
Medina Memorial Hospital SNF
Middletown Park Rehabilitation and Health Care Center
Nesconset Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation
Norwich Rehab & Nursing Center
Oneida Healthcare Extended Care Facility
Our Lady of Mercy Life Center
Park Ridge Living Center
Presbyterian Home for CNY
River Ridge Living Center
St. Peter’s Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
Susquehanna Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
Ten Broeck Commons
Valley Health Services, Inc.
Valley View
Vestal Park Rehabilitation & Nursing Center
Wayne County Nursing Home and Rehab Center

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This project has the potential to drive significant improvements in New York nursing homes by empowering residents, families, and staff to become involved in the process of improving policies and procedures; environment and culture; clinical and personal services; and other factors that affect quality of care and quality of life in long-term care facilities. Each nursing home will identify a Customer Satisfaction Project Champion to lead implementation in the facility. Critical to the success of this project is for the facilities to implement a “third party” survey in an unbiased manner, and to understand and act on the survey data provided by residents and family members. The project will use a written survey, in-person interviews conducted by hired, trained interviewers, resident survey assistance, and family surveys so that those who have difficulty expressing themselves in the traditional pen-and-paper process can still have a voice.

Unique to this project is the employment of a “coach model” which has been used successfully in several other FQC grant projects. FQC recruited experienced regional coaches from across NYS to assist with implementation of the customer satisfaction survey and quality improvement processes. The coach is responsible for working with the facility Champion and interviewers to implement their satisfaction surveys. Coaches will then provide on-site consultation with facility quality improvement teams, residents and families to analyze survey results, identify causes of low scoring elements; and then develop and implement strategies for quality improvement based on their specific customer satisfaction results. Coaches will provide ongoing resources and support to the individual QI teams during this two year project. It is anticipated that this project will result in sustainable improvements in overall satisfaction in participating nursing homes as measured in a second survey to be conducted in 2017.
Emergency Preparedness Update

Capital Region HEPC Conducts Ebola Tabletop Exercise

As a result of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, where infected individuals were brought to the United States for care and other travelers, with possible exposure, crossed into our state, the preparedness community has had to increase and enhance efforts for handling potential Ebola cases or other highly infectious disease. Developed from the experiences and input provided in the sub-regional hot washes from NYSDOH and local community partners, an Ebola-based tabletop exercise (TTX) was held on January 21st in Latham, New York to explore the current operations plans for the possibility of an Ebola case within the Capital District region. The tabletop exercise was planned to test the current operations related to notifications and activations of the HERDS system, roles and responsibilities of partners across the healthcare continuum before, during and after an event, health and safety considerations for the population at large, transport planning, and the role of the NYSDOH Ebola Response Teams (ERT). Participants included representatives from NYSDOH, Capital Region HEPC coordinators, hospitals, post-acute healthcare associations, local health departments, local emergency managers, local and regional EMS coordinators and medical examiners. Staff from NYSHFA attended the exercise and works actively throughout the year with the NYSDOH Bureau of Healthcare Preparedness regarding the role long term care providers can and do play in emergency response.

Decompression Meetings to be Held this Spring

As a continuing five year deliverable of the Emergency Preparedness Grant the Foundation for Quality Care received from the NYSDOH Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, a series of meetings will be held this spring related to Hospital to Nursing Home Decompression. This decompression project (formerly known as “surge”) is designed to explore opportunities for hospitals to discharge patients sooner to nursing homes during a community event that causes an influx of patients to the hospital and the resulting need to open beds. Long term care facilities who meet specific criteria (i.e., the ability to perform intravenous infusion, RN in house 24/7, etc.) have been identified and will be invited to attend these meetings, along with representatives from hospitals, OEMs and other NYSDOH partners, in three areas of the state: the Capital District, Lower Hudson Valley and Long Island. The project includes a collaboration with Yale-New Haven Health Hospital who has developed the template for the Hospital to Nursing Home Decompression Training materials which will be presented at the meetings. Representatives from the three statewide nursing home associations will facilitate the training sessions. Participation in the project is voluntary and the project will expand to the Central and Western areas of the state in subsequent years of the grant cycle.
Kingsway Arms Resident Art Show

Kingsway Arms Nursing Center recently held the opening of their 2016 Art Show. Kingsway featured their resident artists through presentation of their artwork as well as through their first annual Kingsway Community Calendar. The exhibit is comprised of artwork created by residents of Kingsway during a weekly art therapy group. They began the group over a year ago at which time residents started doing “mandala” (circle) drawings each week and they were asked to draw whatever shapes or images came to them at that moment. They also worked on collages of personal images. More recently residents have moved on to painting with watercolors and acrylic paints. During most sessions, residents are merely encouraged to paint whatever comes to them, as a means of free expression. Sometimes they are also encouraged to expand on simple shapes made by the art therapist.

Residents’ Birthday Party at St. Johnsville Rehabilitation and Nursing Center

St Johnsville Rehabilitation and Nursing Center recently had a huge birthday blowout celebration, with the Activity Department, staff, and residents all celebrating the monthly resident birthdays for January, with a celebration of fun and refreshments. One of their residents is 104 years young! “Not only do our residents receive special recognition on their individual birthdate, but a celebration of everyone at our home. It makes it very special being able to celebrate together, it feels like family here,” said Erin O’Bryan, Director of Activities. “Every day is special being able to bring smiles to each resident in some wonderful way.”

Frances Walrath celebrated her 104th Birthday on January 18. Her daughter Nancy and son Byron along with all her friends that live at the St. Johnsville Rehab & Nursing Center attended the celebration. When asked what the key to her happiness in this life was, Frances said, “I always had the goodness of my family.”

Shown left to right are Bob Natusch, RoseAnn Jones, Connie Hiltzley, Catherine Best (staff member), Margie Carlson.

Shown are Edmond Miller and Clara Brown, celebrating with a fabulous treat from the food service department.
Congratulations 2015
NYSHFA District Scholarship Award Winners!

The New York State Health Facilities Association sponsors a District Scholarship program to provide financial help to employees of NYSHFA member skilled nursing facilities who are pursuing a career in health care. A total of six scholarship awards were given in 2015. Each award recipient was selected by their district organization and received a $750 Scholarship.

Following are the individuals who received a district scholarship award in 2015:

- Kristin Crandall, Niagara Rehab & Nursing Center, District 10
- Gerricka Fahy, Palatine Nursing Home, District 5
- Keri Hollenbeck, Briody Health Care Facility, District 10
- Adam Klarowski, McAuley Residence, District 10
- Noel Kratzer, Elcor Nursing & Rehab. Center, District 9
- Jonvier Whittington, Elderwood at Cheektowaga, District 10

The 2016 Scholarship Application Packet has been mailed to members. For further information about the District Scholarship program, visit www.nyshfa.org or contact Joanne O’Connor at joconnor@nyshfa.org.