

February 14, 2024

Tracie Drake
Acting Executive Director
Office of Health Professions
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Washington State Department of Health
via email: tracie.drake@doh.wa.gov

Re: Backlog of Processing Nursing Assistant Credentialing Applications

Dear Tracie,

Washington Health Care Association and LeadingAge Washington jointly reach out to you today to express significant concerns regarding the Department's backlog of processing nursing assistant-certified applications. As of this week, the department is informing applicants they are processing applications that were submitted three months ago (November 2023). This is completely unacceptable and crippling to a workforce already in crisis.

As you are aware, the pandemic significantly affected the healthcare workforce, the effects of which remain dire in long term care. Our facilities were struggling with workforce issues prior to the public health emergency and faced significant barriers related to training, testing, and credentialing of nursing assistants. While the department has made significant strides to overcome these challenges and seek creative solutions to remove barriers, it is now even more distressing to discover that these individuals have completed their training and testing yet cannot obtain a certification from the Department of Health in a timely manner in order to continue to work in their chosen field.

While the department's inability to process these applications timely is a significant barrier for the individuals themselves and all long term care facilities employing them, it is especially concerning for skilled nursing facilities. According to federal requirements, 42 CFR Chapter IV 483.35(d)(1)(i)(ii)(B), nursing facilities are not able to employ these individuals beyond four months in a caregiving capacity. They are not able to restart the four-month clock and can only be employed in a non-caregiving role such as a "hospitality worker" or other ancillary position if the facility has the resources and capabilities to continue their employment. Facilities with multiple individuals awaiting credentialing on similar timelines are unable to sustain these individuals' employment for extended periods of time, let alone months. This delay in the department's ability to process applications results in people leaving their employer in search of job opportunities elsewhere.

WHCA and LeadingAge Washington urge you to seek creative solutions to address the backlog now, as facilities struggle to provide needed staffing and before more of these individuals become unemployed or leave long term care for other professions.

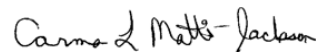
We would like to meet with you in the next week to learn of the current issues facing your office, and brainstorm ways to correct the enormous delays. We respectfully request a weekly progress check-in with your office to determine current application backlogs as well as your unit's progress towards closing the gap between application processing and credential activation.

We look forward to hearing from you so that we can work together to fix this dire issue.

Sincerely,



Deb Murphy, MPA, JD
Chief Executive Officer
LeadingAge Washington



Carma Matti-Jackson
President/CEO
Washington Health Care Association

cc T. Diane Young, Credentialing & Customer Service Transformation Manager
Office of Customer Service
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Washington State Department of Health
via email: diane.young@doh.wa.gov

Sasha de Leon, Assistant Secretary
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Washington State Department of Health
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