

**2021**

# **Annual Report**



**Dignity  
Alliance  
Massachusetts**

Respect • Self-determination • Choices



**Our Mission:** Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is dedicated to transformative change to ensure the dignity of older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. We are committed to advancing new ways of providing long-term services, support, living options, and care, while respecting choice and self-determination. Through education, legislation, regulatory reform, and legal strategies, this mission will become reality throughout the Commonwealth.

Learn more at [dignityalliancema.org](https://dignityalliancema.org)

## Our Story:

**Dignity Alliance Massachusetts (DignityMA)** was formed in mid-2020, motivated by the tragedy of so many deaths from COVID-19 in long-term care facilities. People from aging and disability service and advocacy organizations, individual advocates, policy makers, legal service organizations and attorneys, and concerned citizens came together to accelerate the process of transforming the Commonwealth's antiquated model of long-term care, which prevents older adults and people with disabilities from living their lives with dignity.

DignityMA is working to shift the Commonwealth's emphasis on long-term care from one focused on large institutional facilities, such as nursing homes sheltering hundreds of residents, to a Small House model favored by the U.S. Veterans' Administration when institutional care is needed or preferred. DignityMA seeks to shift the Commonwealth's emphasis from large-scale institutional care to a model of home-and-community based care that allows people to remain in their homes and/or communities, if they are able to and so desire. We are also working to improve the quality of care and safety for people living in facilities, homes, and communities and to recognize and support caregivers in their careers so that they, too, can live lives with dignity.

There are many pieces to this long-term care puzzle that must be put in place, and DignityMA is committed to working with state agencies, the Legislature, the provider sector, and community members to ensure that state-of-the-art long-term services, care and a full array of living choices are available for all who require them within an “Age and Disability Friendly Commonwealth”.

## Decision Making with Dignity

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is led by a Coordinating Committee that guides the day-to-day activities of the coalition and eight Work Groups focused on the key issues areas: Legislative; Facilities; Home & Community-Based Services; Housing; Behavioral Health; Legal; Veterans; and Communications. Proposals for advocacy – whether legislation, regulations, or communication – generally arise from the Work Groups but may also be suggested by individual participants or the Coordinating Committee. After review and discussion by the Coordinating Committee, matters are presented to DignityMA’s full membership for discussion and consensus approval. If consensus is achieved, the matter is circulated to the full membership for approval, disapproval, or abstention, and members may also choose to add their names or the name of their organization as identified endorsers. The results of support or opposition are then communicated to the appropriate official(s) or agency.



# 2021 Objectives:

This year, our aim continued to be to advance policies that revolutionize long-term care, putting the dignity of individuals first, ensuring affordable options for community living, and providing living wages and benefits for caregivers and service workers in facilities and home and community-based settings. Below describes our key goals and specifics around each goal.



## Goal 1: Build a More Resilient & Higher Quality Long-Term Care System

- Resident-centered care with single occupancy rooms, full-time infection prevention, falls prevention, abuse prevention, strengthened family councils, small (max. 12 residents) facilities
- Optimal nurse and staff ratios, including an update of social work regulations from the 1970s.
- Safe visitation policies in all long-term care settings, both congregate and home care
- Nursing homes to be the last option among choices for long-term care
- Improvements in care and treatment for older, frail inmates of correctional institutions



## Goal 2: Give Meaning & Purpose to More Age-Friendly Communities

- Adoption of a Community First 1915 Medicaid Waiver
- Expanding community options and supports to ensure integrated opportunities so all persons can remain in their homes and communities of their choice
- Age-friendly, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant communities with affordable, accessible housing and public transportation
- An end to ageism and ableism in every community in the Commonwealth





### Goal 3: Protect & Support Caregivers of Older Adults & People with Disabilities

- A living wage and enhanced benefits for caregivers
- The broadest possible education in geriatrics for all health care professionals & staff
- Behavioral health and wellness programs for long-term care staff



### Goal 4: Strengthen Age-Friendly Emergency Procedures & Response

- Enhanced emergency plans, adequate supplies of testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and vaccinations for residents and staff of skilled nursing facilities and home care personnel



### Goal 5: Increased Oversight, Accountability, & Transparency of Long-Term Care Providers

- Improvements to the response to complaints and deficiencies in skilled nursing facilities, rest homes and assisted living residences.
- Non-profit ownership of long-term care facilities.



# 2021 ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Education & Advocacy

A major part of Dignity Alliance Massachusetts' advocacy efforts includes informing state agencies, members of the Legislature, the provider sector, the media, and interested citizens on issues affecting older adults and people with disabilities. Throughout 2021, Dignity Alliance published [The Tuesday Digest \(now called The Dignity Digest\)](#), a free weekly compilation of news articles, quotes, studies, conferences and other material to inform readers and spur opportunities for engagement. The Digest has more than 500 weekly subscribers.

## Legislative

The Legislative Work Group studies current Congressional, State Senate, and House legislation to determine which bills align with Dignity Alliance's mission and goals. Additionally, the group educates Dignity Alliance participants on the Legislature and legislative process, works closely with other work groups to advance bills which support the mission. It oversees Dignity Alliance's Legislator Awards..

In 2021, Dignity Alliance Massachusetts's Legislative Work Group coordinated with other DignityMA Work Groups and reviewed and recommended 70 state legislative bills and 10 federal legislative bills, which addressed our goals, for endorsement and recommended passage of several FY '22 state budget amendments for housing vouchers, behavioral health, and other issues. The Legislative Work Group also led DignityMA in coordinating testimony for major bills.

In addition, DignityMA sought and received an Opinion from the State Ethics Commission on lobbying, developed Dignity Alliance's response to [Senate Committee on Reimagining Long-Term Care](#); provided support for the Veterans Long-Term Care Work Group in enacting Chapter 15 of the Acts of 2021, including advocating for \$200 million funding for small long-term care homes for veterans around the Commonwealth; and developed criteria for selecting Dignity Alliance Massachusetts first "Outstanding Dignity Legislator" awards.

# Facilities

The Facilities Work Group (Nursing Homes, Rest Homes, and Assisted Living) addresses quality of care and quality of life issues affecting residents. This work group focuses on developing policy recommendations on a wide range of issues including residents' rights, safe staffing levels, workforce training and wages, COVID-19 pandemic issues, oversight and enforcement, nursing home licensure, closure and financing policies, and more.

In 2021, the Facilities Work Group provided **written and oral** testimony in the following hearings on a wide range of nursing home issues:

- 3/1/21 Department of Public Health Hearing on proposed amendments to 105 CMR 150.000 Standards for Long Term Care Facilities addressing:
  - o New staffing standard of 3.58 HPRD (hours of care per resident per day), including .5 RN HPRD; and
  - o Reduction of number of beds per room in existing nursing homes to no more than two, plus related construction requirements.
- 6/30/21 Joint Committee on Elder Affairs Hearing on the following bills:
  - o S.413/H.733 An Act to improve employer standards for Massachusetts nursing homes: addresses nursing home licensures, workforce annual survey, and comprehensive review of nursing home finances;
  - o S.414/H.727 An Act to ensure quality of care in nursing homes: addresses 4.1 hours per resident per day staffing standard, outbreak response plans, social isolation prevention policies, blueprint to minimize congregate living; and
  - o S.406 An Act relative to small house nursing homes: addresses construction of “small home” nursing homes which house 10-14 residents, a more personalized setting than current large facilities, in order to return control, dignity, and a sense of well-being to residents, while providing high-quality, person-centered care.



The following examples highlight some of the Work Group's 2021 accomplishments and efforts:

- Authored: “Nursing Home Recommendations for Reform”, an extensive report covering: ongoing critical quality and safety issues; COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemic issues; long-term care workforce – minimum staffing standards, training, wages and benefits; oversight and enforcement; nursing home licensure, closures, and finances; and living options – small home model and HCBS opportunities.

- Authored: “Recommendations to Achieve a Successful Transition for Nursing Home Residents in Both Voluntary and Involuntary Nursing Home Closures.”
- Authored: “Resolution Calling on Nursing Home Providers and Caregivers: Mandate COVID-19 Vaccinations to Protect All in their Care”, plus an update to include boosters; and
- Updated: “Visitation Policy and Isolation Prevention 2020 Recommendations” to incorporate the latest 2021 CMS guidance.
- Requested that the Massachusetts State Auditor undertake audits concerning: 7/1/16-6/30/18 MA State Auditor report addressing timely investigation of high priority complaints by the MA Department of Public Health; overuse and misuse of anti-psychotics and other psychotropic medications with nursing home residents; and transparent information regarding COVID-19 deaths.

In addition, throughout the year, the Facilities Work Group advocated for transformation by working alongside other DignityMA Work Groups and providing its expertise to improve the lives of long-term care residents and their caregivers.

## Home & Community Based Services (HCBS)

The Home and Community-Based Services Work Group focuses on improving and promoting access to home and community-based services as an essential component of the Commonwealth’s long-term services and support continuum.

The group advocates for programs and services that keep individuals in their homes and communities so that they can receive the necessary, person-centered care in the least restrictive setting while preventing the unnecessary admissions to nursing homes. It also works to enhance the Commonwealth’s long-term services and support continuum so that nursing home residents, who do not oppose it, might transition home or back to their community with appropriate care. This Work Group also examines the many factors that impact one’s ability to receive care at home, including service capacity and delivery and the state’s waiver and other specialty programs.



- Provided testimony on behalf of:
  - o [S89/H1305](#) Act allowing a Spouse to Be a Caregiver
  - o [S418/H745](#) Act to Establish Personal Care Homes
  - o [S184/H446](#) Warranty Protection for Persons with Disabilities
- Outreach:
  - o Submitted letter to the Joint Committee on Ways & Means & House Committee with recommendations on Federal Stimulus
  - o Sent correspondence to various stakeholders with recommendations on ARPA Spending
  - o Sent recommendations to various stakeholders on alleviating the homecare staffing crisis
- Advocacy
  - o Development of Recommendations for Reform, containing detailed proposals to improve HCBS capacity and service delivery
  - o Co-authored letter for renewal of the Community First Choice 1115 Waiver

## Housing

The Housing Work Group has undertaken a pilot to provide 50 Alternative Housing Voucher Project (AHVP) vouchers to transition people out of nursing homes through the independent living center network.

In 2021, the Housing Work Group created the AHVP Nursing Home Pilot. Over the winter of 2021, the Work Group met with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and convinced the agency to create a pilot program with the independent living center (ILC) network. The pilot allocated 50 vouchers specifically for people coming out of nursing homes. These individuals would receive support from the ILCs to tackle and turn in the necessary paperwork to receive these vouchers and undertake searches for housing. Approximately 100 nursing home residents applied for the vouchers and 85 were eligible.

The AHVP Nursing Home Pilot is ongoing. The emphasis on housing as a key to transitions from nursing home facilities back to the community will continue.

# Behavioral Health

The Behavioral Health Work Group advocates with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to discharge nursing home residents who are under 60 and to provide appropriate community based housing and behavioral health services; and advocates with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs to provide effective and appropriate behavioral health services for community based frail older adults so that they can remain in the community and prevent long-term nursing home placement.

In 2021, the Behavioral Health Work Group joined with the Legislative, Facilities, Home and Community Based Services and Legal Work Groups to advocate to end the overuse and misuse of antipsychotics and other psychotropic medications with nursing home residents. As part of their advocacy efforts, the group solicited an audit by the MA State Auditor. Efforts have begun to organize around the goal to increase social work hours in nursing homes in order to provide more appropriate and effective resident care.



# Legal

The Legal Work Group provides feedback and guidance to other work groups and to the organization as a whole pertaining to laws and procedures. Additionally, the group analyzes cases for their relevance to Dignity Alliance and helps draft and edit position papers for other work groups.

In 2021, the Legal Work Group worked on many legal and legislative endeavors related to nursing home resident health and safety during Covid-19; nursing home visitation; vaccine requirements; and more. The group also fielded inquiries from DignityMA members pertaining to law and regulations governing nursing facilities and home and community-based programs and services.

# Veteran Services

The Veteran Services Work Group supports issues related to older veterans and those with disabilities related to issues around long-term care services and support.

In 2021, the Veteran Services Work Group advocated on behalf of veterans living at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home, where at least 77 veterans died due to the Covid-19 pandemic and management failures..

The Work Group led DignityMA's efforts urging the Commonwealth to put aside its proposal to construct a 235-bed, long term care facility and, instead, follow the Veterans Administration's Small House Model Design Guide to create resident-centered communities focused on the needs and preferences of veterans. The Small House Model provides exceptional rehabilitative and hospice care and chronic disease management, with sufficient staff and equipment to support all personal care and assistance needs, using intentional communities of approximately 10 residents living in homes with private bedrooms with full baths. The guiding principles are autonomy and dignity.

# Communications

The Communications Work group raises awareness of Dignity Alliance and initiatives and shares topical news and resources. Members of this group update the website, brainstorm content, campaign ideas and educational opportunities, and advocate through social media and public relations.

In 2021, the Communications Work Group advocated for change through media efforts, including coordinating communications planning and execution; outreach as op-eds, news releases, and letters to the editors; social media activities; and coordinating communications activities among the Work Groups.

**Follow us on social!**



## Dignity Alliance Work groups



**Coordinating Committee – Co-Chairs: Bill Henning & Paul Lanzikos**

**Legislative – Chair: Richard T. Moore**

**Facilities & Regulations – Chair: Arlene Germain**

**Home & Community Based Services – Chair: Meg Coffin**

**Behavioral Health – Chair: Frank Baskin**

**Housing – Co-Chairs: Shaya French & Bill Henning**

**Communications – Co-Chairs: Samantha VanSchoick, Priscilla O'Reilly, & Lachlan Forrow**

**Legal Issues – Co-Chairs: Jeni Kaplan and Clarence Richardson**

**Veteran Services – James Lomastro, Ph.D**

### **Participants:**

(\*) Designates Member of Coordinating Committee

- Doris Bardwell, RN
- Frank E. Baskin, LICSW\*
- Joe Bellil
- Charles Carr, former Commissioner, Mass. Rehab. Commission\*
- Meg Coffin\*
- Cassie Cramer
- Mike Festa\*
- Judi Fonsh, MSW
- Lachlan Forrow, MD\*
- Shaya French\*
- Nomita Ganguly
- Arlene Germain\*
- Wynn Gerhard, Esq.
- Pamela Goodwin
- Jerry Halberstadt
- Bill Henning\*
- Sandy Hovey
- L. Scott Harshbarger, Former Attorney General
- Chris Hoeh
- Jeni Kaplan, Esq.\*
- Colin Killick\*
- James Lomastro, PhD
- Linda Landry
- Paul J. Lanzikos, Former Secretary of Elder Affairs\*
- Posie Mansfield
- Richard T. Moore, Former Senate President Pro Tempore\*
- Sandy Alissa Novack, MBA, MSW
- Daniel O'Leary
- Priscilla O'Reilly\*
- Lisa Orgettas
- David Polakoff, MD
- Vicky Pulos
- Clarence Richardson, Esq.\*
- Yashira Ruiz
- Marlene Sallo
- Stephen Schwartz, Esq.
- Sue Rorke
- Kate Symmonds
- Scott Trenti
- Alison Weingartner
- Samantha VanSchoick\*

**Organizations:**

- Alzheimer's Association of Massachusetts & New Hampshire
- Boston Center for Independent Living
- Center for Living & Work
- Center for Public Representation
- COP Amputee Association
- Disability Law Center
- Disability Policy Consortium
- Disability Resource Center
- Easter Seals Massachusetts
- Greater Boston Chapter, United Spinal Associates
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Hospice & Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts
- Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- MetroWest Center for Independent Living
- Mystic Valley Elder Services
- Mass NAELA (National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys)
- Older Adult Behavioral Health Network
- O'Reilly Communications
- SeniorCare, Inc.
- Stavros Center for Independent Living
- Stop Bullying Coalition

**Dignity Alliance Massachusetts meets via Zoom sessions every other Tuesday afternoon. To participate in a session or for more information about Dignity Alliance Massachusetts, please contact us via [info@dignityalliancema.org](mailto:info@dignityalliancema.org).**