



LATN19 Town Hall Mtg 7.31.19



Forty-four engaged LeadingAge Tennessee members stayed through the last day at Annual Conference 2019 to participate in the state's second LeadingAge Policy Town Hall, held on Wednesday, July 31 in Nashville. Gwyn Earl and Van Cluck facilitated the session with Ruth Katz attending from LeadingAge National. The discussion was lively and honest. Participants had so much to say, we ran out of time!

The purpose of LeadingAge Town Halls is to hear from members around the country about the challenges that keep them up at night – challenges that might be amenable to policy solutions, mostly at the federal level. Gwyn and Van laid the groundwork and Ruth noted briefly that we heard from over 3,000 members in 34 states last year; we are on track to hear from an even greater number this year. The challenges and ideas for solutions that members surface during these meetings lead directly into setting the policy agenda for the work LeadingAge does for you in Washington, DC.

The first order of business was to identify the top issues Tennessee members face. As expected, and consistent with members across the country, workforce shortages and related concerns polled high. However, Tennessee members pointed out a second top tier concern – the proliferation of assisted living providers in the state. The market is saturated, especially with new for-profit providers.

Delving deeper into the workforce issues, members talked about how they advertise positions. Facebook was identified as a top tool, INDEED and job fairs were on the list too. "But we set up 10 interviews and only 2 of them even show up", one person said. A participant brought up the topic of partnering with education settings – high schools and colleges. Several ideas surfaced, including partnering for internships and field placements and offering "free lunch and a free class, and we'll interview you and, if it works out, hire you on the spot."

Use of agency staff is a continual struggle. One person talked about quality implications of continually changing agency staff. Another said they'd made a commitment to stop using agency staff, describing the amped up recruitment effort that this entailed. Gwyn asked about childcare as a challenge for employers and the response was overwhelming agreement. "We need true intergenerational programming that includes child care, someone needs to take this on," Gwyn added. A discussion of various models and structural ideas ensued, as well as identification of barriers (e.g., insurance). Participants discussed topics ranging from providing free "summer camp" for staff members' children to covering child care on the third shift.

Two thirds of those who answered the polling question about foreign born workers said they would be interested in a guest worker program to bring workers from other countries in on time limited agreements to work in aging service agencies. Those who weren't interested noted language and culture as barriers.

Gwyn led an informed conversation about assisted living, covering the regulations and funding. An interesting conversation came up around challenges for multi-level service organizations – it's difficult to keep families together when they need differing levels of care. But LA-TN members are resourceful!
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said “we must use creative thinking...and help families get the best bang for the buck,” describing a program that offers day programming when one spouse is in a dementia unit and the other in a less intense service. Gwyn and Van offered extensive support and talked about upcoming meetings with regulators that members will be able to attend. Issues around life safety and third shift drills came up and were discussed.

Serving middle market seniors is on the minds of many members in Tennessee. As one person summarized, “something has shaken everyone in my life plan community to the core. This population cannot afford the care we are providing. Let’s think about the average senior...how can we structure services and costs that make sense.” Again, in addition to surfacing problems, thoughtful participants in the town hall took a good look at themselves and discussed ideas for solutions.

As the discussion turned to health care, challenges around getting claims paid on time (or at all) surfaced. Hospital referrals are a concern too; sometimes incentives are structured in a way that results in families not getting the care they need and not understanding their appeal rights. Sometimes, one person said, “we face a discharge plan that we don’t think is safe.”

The conversation was still lively and engaged when the group ran out of time. Van closed, noting that “when we have issues like this,” we have to “...get together and let them know we will take action.” The value proposition of LeadingAge Tennessee and LeadingAge national -- in clearly working with members to identify policy challenges, keep them in the forefront, and find solutions -- was clear throughout the discussion.

LeadingAge Tennessee members who participated in the town hall are a uniquely thoughtful, mission driven, creative group of providers. Barriers were surfaced – but so were ideas and solutions. As one participant said, we should always be asking ourselves, “are we doing this for money or for the families who need our services? If you’re truly mission oriented, you do it for the families.” And in closing, Gwyn noted this is a great reminder for all of our members, not for profit and for profit alike. “And we’ll continue working together, sharing proven solutions, helping each other, as we all help them (residents/clients).”