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HCAM Responds to Auditor General's Findings on the Reporting of the Number of COVID Related Deaths in Long Term Care

Melissa Samuel, President/CEO of the Health Care Association of Michigan (HCAM), today responded to the recent document from the Office of the Auditor General on the reporting of COVID related deaths in long term care.

“Even as the primary focus must continue to be responding to the current crisis, all stakeholders have an interest in learning from this pandemic in order to properly prepare for the next crisis,” Samuel said. “Accurate reporting of all aspects of COVID-19 is an essential part of that learning and preparation process.”

Samuel noted, however, that it is highly likely that inconsistencies will appear when examining and comparing different data bases or sources that might contain information on the location of COVID deaths. Among the reasons are the following:

- Time frames utilized in reporting systems, the transfer of data between these systems, and subsequent data base analysis may result in different numbers of skilled nursing facility COVID deaths.
- Evolving reporting protocols.
- The cause of death listed in the death certificate might not align with an earlier cause of death determination, or might inaccurately list the location of death.
- Multi-level care settings, such as assisted living, skilled nursing care, and independent living, occasionally share the same physical address.
- Communication challenges between health care settings likely caused unintended reporting omissions.
- Incomplete reporting from providers could also have occurred, particularly in the early weeks of the pandemic, in part due to the lack of supplies, inadequate testing, the intensity of the rapid spread of COVID, and the need to prioritize activities on the care of residents and limiting the spread of the virus. This likely also happened later and throughout the pandemic, as staff turnover mounted, including those responsible for reporting, and replacement staff needed time to become proficient on state and federal reporting requirements.

“Accurate reporting must take these issues into account,” Samuel said. “Conclusions about COVID reporting need to consider the context of the COVID pandemic itself: the intensity of its spread, the initial lack of knowledge by health professionals on how to respond; few supplies and inadequate testing in the first months; staff challenges because of exposure to COVID, and changes in guidance from various levels of government throughout the pandemic.”

“The past two years have been the most difficult the profession has ever experienced and we need to recognize the caregivers who daily put their own lives and health at risk to protect Michigan’s most vulnerable citizens,” Samuel concluded.

Please see the corresponding document for further information.