

Member Call Summary

January 9, 2026

Session Preview- Tom Cope

Iowa awarded \$209 million for first year of federal Rural Health Transformation Program

Governor Kim Reynolds and the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced on December 29 that Iowa has been awarded funding through the Rural Health Transformation Program, a federal initiative managed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Iowa's innovative proposal, Healthy Hometowns, will receive \$209 million for the first year of implementation.

Healthy Hometowns is Iowa's plan to strengthen health care in rural communities by making care more accessible, connected, and patient focused. This initiative is about more than health care. It's about helping Iowans live healthier lives, closer to home.

Healthy Hometowns includes five key initiatives:

- **Hometown Connections:** Builds partnerships to expand health care options in rural areas.
- **Combat Cancer:** A statewide effort to improve cancer prevention, treatment, and outcomes.
- **Communities of Care:** Supports projects that bring different types of providers together under one roof.
- **Health Information Exchange:** Makes health records accessible across Iowa so patients can get care wherever they are.
- **Community Care Mobile:** Invests in telehealth and mobile health care programs, including high-risk maternal transport.

To learn more about Healthy Hometowns, visit HHS.Iowa.Gov/HealthyHometowns.

New MFP Online Referral Form

Effective January 6, 2026, the MFP program will launch a newly created online MFP Referral Form. Upon implementation of the new online referral form, no other methods of referrals will be accepted. The link to the new referral form can be found on the MFP website at [Money Follows the Person \(MFP\) Health & Human Services](#).

If you have questions, please contact the MFP team: Iowa MFP Team at mfpcentral@hhs.iowa.gov.

The Countdown Is On: 2026 Awards Nominations Close Soon

The clock is ticking. With just one week remaining, now is the time to shine a spotlight on the individuals and organizations shaping the future of aging services in Iowa.

The [2026 LeadingAge Iowa Awards](#) celebrate excellence, innovation, leadership, and commitment across our member community. These awards honor those who go above and beyond—driving impact, inspiring teams, and improving lives every day.

Why submit a nomination?

- Recognize outstanding leadership and innovation
- Elevate your organization and colleagues statewide
- Celebrate achievements that deserve to be seen and shared

Nominations are open across multiple award categories, and self-nominations are welcome. The process is straightforward, and the recognition is meaningful.

Submission Deadline Extended to: Friday, January 23

Don't miss the opportunity to ensure deserving work and leadership receive the recognition they've earned. To read more and nominate, click [here](#).

Join us in celebrating excellence and telling the powerful stories that move our field forward.

For any questions, email Michelle Rybicki at mrybicki@leadingageil.org.

Respiratory Outbreak Reporting Guidance

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI) team issued reminders on health care setting reporting of respiratory illness outbreaks as cases increase across the state. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were emailed on Friday, January 2 and include the following FAQs related to acute respiratory illness reporting.

1. When should a respiratory outbreak be reported?

Influenza: One laboratory-confirmed influenza positive resident along with other residents having respiratory illness symptoms in a unit within a 72 hour period.

COVID-19: Three or more COVID-19 positive residents occurring within a 14 day period.

Other Respiratory Viruses: One laboratory-confirmed positive resident along with other residents having respiratory illness symptoms in a unit within a 72 hour period.

2. What facility type is included in this reporting guidance?

Long-term care facilities are defined as institutions that provide healthcare to people who are unable to manage independently in the community. This includes

nursing homes, inpatient units and other residential facilities that provide chronic care management or shorter-term rehabilitative services

3. Are staff members included in the reporting criteria?

No, the reporting guidance is focused on residents and staff should not be counted towards the initial amount.

4. Should a facility report a single positive COVID-19 resident?

5. No, the reporting threshold for COVID is three or more COVID-19 positive residents occurring within a 14-day period.

6. Where should a facility go for additional guidance?

<https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/providers-professionals/iowa-influenza-surveillance>

<https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/providers-professionals/hai-prevention>

7. Is there a HIPPA compliant online form that can be used to report?

Yes, there is a secure redcap survey that should be used when reporting an outbreak. <https://redcap.idph.state.ia.us/surveys/?s=ALL97K8KMNMX8AF>

8. How often should a facility fill out the REDCap survey?

A facility only needs to fill out the redcap survey once during a respiratory outbreak.

The HAI team will check in weekly with your facility while you are in outbreak status.

The HAI team will close the outbreak for you when no new cases are identified for two incubation periods, (e.g., 14 days for COVID, 8 days for influenza, etc.).

If new cases are identified after an outbreak has been closed, a new REDCap survey will need to be completed.

9. Does Iowa HHS issue a report on current respiratory trends?

Yes, the Iowa HHS influenza program summarizes all flu data along with some other viral respiratory illnesses in regular surveillance reports.

During respiratory season, this report is issued weekly. [Sign up to receive the weekly respiratory virus surveillance report.](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, always feel free to reach out to the HAI team at hai-ar@hhs.iowa.gov or contact your regional nurse clinician. The first Tuesday of each month at 12:00 p.m. CT, the HAI team hosts a LTC Open Office Hours. You can register for the calls [here](#).

LeadingAge to HHS: Revise COVID Guidelines for Healthcare Settings

LeadingAge [sent a letter](#) to Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on December 23 urging the Secretary to take immediate action to empower the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) to update COVID guidelines for health settings, including patient/resident isolation periods and return-to-work guidance for healthcare personnel. This letter is the latest in many previous actions taken by LeadingAge to highlight this issue, including both written advocacy and discussions with both CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). LeadingAge pointed out that healthcare setting recommendations have not been updated since the end of the public health emergency and remain inconsistent with current general public health guidance. This discrepancy places unnecessary restrictions on older adults in nursing homes, solely because of their living situation. LeadingAge will continue to press for updates to these recommendations, which are enforced by CMS as accepted national standards.

Advanced Assessment Course Launched

LeadingAge Iowa is pleased to announce that the on-demand Advanced Assessment course is now available! We have a link on our website [Advanced Assessment Program](#) to the VGM website to register for the course. Members can email the LAI team or our info@leadingageiowa.org email to receive an exclusive \$150 discount. This means your team members can access the content for only \$49! Following each module, participants will complete a short knowledge check as well as written competency evaluation on completion of all eight modules. Once completed, a certificate of completion will be provided which includes four CEU hours.

Upcoming Events

Advancing Nutrition Excellence in Long-Term Care: Standards, Compliance & Clinical Impact Webinar Series (virtual)

January 15, February 12 & April 16, 2026 from 2-3 p.m.

Adult Day Networking Meeting (virtual)

January 27, 2026 from 1-2 p.m.

Regional Networking Meeting (in-person)

February 18, 2026 from 1-3 p.m.

Location: Oaknoll Retirement Residence, 1 Oaknoll Ct., Iowa City, IA

Leadership Academy (in-person)

Dates & Locations:

February 25-26, 2026, Friendship Haven, Fort Dodge
April 1-2, 2026, Deerfield Retirement Community, Urbandale
June 10-11, 2026, Oaknoll Retirement Residence, Iowa City
August 19-20, 2026, Perry Lutheran Homes, Perry

AAPACN Resident Assessment Coordinator Certified (RAC-CT®) Certified Workshop (virtual)

March 16 & 17 & March 23 & 24, 2026 from 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.