



## Reflections on Maine & New Hampshire Town Hall Conversation

The LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire Town Hall Conversation, held on Monday, October 1, 2018 in Scarborough, Maine drew 25 thoughtful, experienced providers. Five issue areas were covered: Affordable Housing, Nursing Homes, Life Plan Communities and Assisted Living, Workforce, and Payment for Long-Term Services and Supports. Lisa Henderson, Executive Director of LeadingAge ME&NH employed a unique “world café” format that elicited deep engagement and participation from attendees.

**Major Points.** Top line points covered by facilitators in the report out at the end were as follows:

On **affordable housing**, waiting lists are a major concern, some as long as 3-4 years. Particularly in rural areas, people would like a choice beyond hanging on at home and going into a nursing home, but the lack of available affordable housing limits their choices. A theme that ran through many of the topics in this Town Hall was attending to the middle market, which is going to grow as the population ages and saves less. There’s a need for new models of affordable assisted living.

The **nursing home** discussion was animated and comprehensive. “The RoPs are overwhelming.” Concerns about perception of nursing homes (“bad places, bad things happen”) came up. “The new survey process doesn’t feel like a process at all,” one participant said. This conversation delved into managed and integrated care issues, exploring relationships between nursing homes and ACOs – “hospitals are very prescriptive.” Workforce came up in this group, as it did in all the theme areas, with the statement that we don’t honor people who work in nursing homes for their hard work. As has been the case with many members in town halls across the country, there is frustration with federal rules and strictures. “As far as CMS is concerned, if someone is making a dollar, that will have to be changed,”

The **life plan community** discussion groups suggested that we will need to revisit the medical expense deduction changes in the recent tax reform law. This group took on long-term care planning and education, suggesting a need to promote to the general public that they start planning and saving earlier. Life safety code issues came up, as did a suggestion that perhaps smaller SNFs could be held to a different set of standards and a different survey process than larger ones.

**Workforce** produced a lot of discussion and some ideas. One unique question was whether agencies that provide contract staff could be regulated, to control costs and to enable providers to manage overall staffing in a way that produces the best quality and least permanent staff turnover. The competition for labor, especially in states like these with a lot of tourism, is high. Participants suggested a need for early education about aging careers and talked about ways that existing providers could be cross trained and shared (e.g., EMTs could become CNAs). Partnerships with colleges and universities were suggested and immigration was discussed in a

few ways as part of the workforce conversation. For instance, one idea was to make it easier for new immigrants to learn English. The aging of the workforce was also a topic at this table.

Regarding ***paying for long-term services and supports***, discussion fell into three areas: improvements to existing programs, big ideas about existing programs and radical out of the box thinking about innovation and change. Several Medicaid reimbursement issues came up, including much talk about match rates and the relationship between the federal and state governments; one person pointed out that in a state with no income or sales tax, New Hampshire, there are few ways to raise state share and a lot of federal money is left on the table. Conversation covered the HCBS “Settings Rule,” challenges paying for adult day services including related transportation, and the fact that federal regulations eat up resources that could go into resident care. Managing multiple Medicare Advantage plans was an issue for many. In the mid range, it was suggested that to be ready for the Boomers, we need more flexibility in federal programs and the ability to combine them. Finally, in the grand idea category, there were suggestions about creating a financing program with a federal backstop and collecting social security on ALL income and using the additional funds to establish a LTSS program.