

Governor Walz Announces First National Guard Response Teams Deployed to Staff Long-Term Care Facilities; Fourth Hospital Alternative Care Site Opens

National Guard members will deploy as nursing assistants in long-term care facilities in New Hope, Onamia, and Fergus Falls

New Hastings alternative care facility to relieve hospital capacity

Governor Tim Walz today announced the deployment of the first three National Guard skilled-nursing response teams to support long-term care facilities facing severe staffing shortages. Additionally, a fourth alternative care site will open this week to which hospitals can send non-critical patients as they work to open bed space for those sick with COVID-19.

Today's actions are the latest from the Walz-Flanagan Administration to support long-term care facilities and hospitals facing bed shortages and staffing gaps during the current wave of COVID-19 infections.

Governor Walz today also announced a new initiative to recruit, train, and deploy at least 1,000 new certified nursing assistants for Minnesota long-term care facilities experiencing staffing shortages by the end of January.

"We continue to deploy every resource we have available to support our overworked and understaffed doctors, nurses, and long-term care staff who have been fighting on the frontlines of this pandemic for nearly two years," said Governor Walz. "I'm grateful to the National Guard and our long-term care partners for their hard work and dedication to Minnesota patients. While the National Guard response teams and alternative care sites will provide critical temporary relief, our health care providers cannot bear the stress of any unnecessary spread. Every Minnesotan has a role to play in reducing hospital capacity by simply getting vaccinated, getting their booster, getting tested, and wearing a mask indoors in public."

"We are working hard to ensure our hospitals and long-term care facilities are supported and every Minnesotan can receive the care they need – and I am grateful for all our partners who are making these National Guard deployments and alternative care sites possible," said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. "The best thing Minnesotans can do to help support our health care heroes is by following easy steps that we know work to reduce hospital capacity: get vaccinated, get boosted if you're due, get tested if you feel sick, and wear a mask in public."

"It's very important as Minnesota grapples with the continued Delta surge and the uncertainties of the new Omicron variant that we continue to do everything we can to support our front-line workers," said Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcom. "These women and men have been working tirelessly for nearly 22 months to provide care to our loved ones, and we are so grateful for their continued service. We are also grateful for the National Guard and our long-term care partners for stepping up in new ways to help bolster that work."

Fifty National Guard members to support long-term care staffing

Fifty National Guard service members will provide staffing support to North Ridge Health and Rehab in New Hope, Mille Lacs Health System Long Term Care in Onamia, and PioneerCare in Fergus Falls. The response teams are arriving today and will begin providing care on Tuesday.

Last month, Governor Walz activated the Minnesota National Guard to provide emergency support to facilities that experience severe staffing crises or are at risk of closure. About 400

National Guard members have been trained as certified nursing assistants and temporary nursing aides and will deploy as response teams to qualifying Minnesota long-term care facilities.

In addition to today's deployments, more long-term care sites around the state will receive National Guard response teams later this week.

The Minnesota National Guard has nearly 600 service members supporting COVID-19 operations across the state. In addition to the support at long-term care facilities, they are providing testing support at six COVID-19 community-based testing sites.

"Together, the Minnesota Department of Health, other professional partners, and the Minnesota National Guard medical staff have trained selected service members as certified nursing assistants and temporary nursing aides to support this activation," said Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke. "Our citizen Soldiers and Airmen are part of your community, we live here, we work here, and more than ever over the last year and a half, we continue to serve here. To the members of the Minnesota National Guard, thank you for continuing to serve professionally and with dignity and respect."

"At PioneerCare, it is our top priority to provide quality care for our community's most vulnerable and frail members. We greatly appreciate the temporary support the Minnesota National Guard will provide as we come together in our missions of service to those in our community," said Nathan Johnson, CEO at PioneerCare. "Our staff members are stretched thin, and the stress of COVID-19 has taken a toll. While our staff are exhausted, their ongoing professionalism, commitment, and resilience has been admirable. Our staff deserve this temporary relief and much more. We welcome the National Guard members who will join our team for the next two weeks to help us provide safe, quality care for the seniors we serve."

"North Ridge Health and Rehab continues to be a healthcare staple for local seniors in need of skilled nursing services. Despite the increased demand during the pandemic, North Ridge was able to care for hundreds of patients needing higher acuity care when others could not. The staff rose to the challenge - and with the proper support - patients received complex care and services via dedicated healthcare professionals who never left their post," said Julie Spiers, Administrator of North Ridge Health and Rehab. "I am thrilled to share that North Ridge Health and Rehab will be welcoming 30 National Guard trained CNAs on Monday. North Ridge leadership proactively applied for the assistance of the Minnesota. We applaud the use of the Minnesota National Guard to help nursing facilities respond to significant staffing challenges which has been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Like all facilities, we are experiencing a significant shortage of staff, though the employees we have continue to go above and beyond to make sure our residents are cared for," said Cynthia Sutherland, Mille Lacs Health System Long Term Care Director of Nursing. "But having the Guard here is not only uplifting to our morale, but is also very much appreciated for the actual trained workers we desperately need. It helps us to maintain the high quality standard of care and safety that our long term care residents and families expect from us."

Fourth Alternative Care Site to Open for Non-Emergency Patients

In addition to training and deploying National Guard response teams to skilled-nursing sites, Governor Walz is taking action to assist Minnesota hospitals by opening up bed space in other long-term care facilities around the state.

Governor Walz announced today that a fourth facility will open this week as an alternative care site to accept and treat certain patients from Twin Cities hospitals.

Benedictine Living Community-Regina in Hastings will be able to accept up to 17 patients from surrounding hospitals. A team of nurses will provide transitional care to patients who are currently hospitalized, allowing hospitals to treat those sick with COVID-19 and others requiring emergency care.

Hospitals report that a number of their patients should instead be treated at long-term care facilities, including those who have recently had surgery and no longer need hospital-level care but cannot yet go home. Due to staffing and bed shortages, hospitals are not able to transfer these patients to long-term care settings.

Benedictine Living Community-Regina joins Cerenity Marian (27 beds), Good Samaritan Society – Bethany in Brainerd (34 beds) and Benedictine St. Gertrude's in Shakopee (27 beds) in providing transitional care to patients.

“Benedictine is pleased to partner with the State of Minnesota in this unique time of need and have Benedictine Living Community-Regina participate in Minnesota’s hospital decompression program,” said Benedictine President and CEO Jerry Carley. “Our experience with the program at Benedictine St. Gertrude’s and Cerenity Care Center-Marian of Saint Paul has encouraged us to move forward with expanding our participation and serving a greater number of individuals in need of care.”

Governor Walz is implementing an action plan to support Minnesota hospitals and long-term care facilities deal with staffing shortages and a spike in COVID-19 cases.

In addition to deploying National Guard response teams and standing up alternative care sites, Governor Walz has:

- Launched an initiative to recruit, train, and deploy 1,000 new certified nursing assistants to Minnesota long-term care facilities in two months;
- Secured federal emergency staffing teams to relieve staff at three Minnesota hospitals;
- Made \$50 million in federal American Rescue Plan funding available for immediate emergency grants to long-term care facilities to hire and retain employees;
- Expanded the Emergency Staffing Pool so that short-term emergency temporary staff could be used to open up additional long-term care beds for patients ready to be discharged from a hospital; and
- Directed the Department of Human Services to free up capacity at state-operated long-term care facilities.