



JOIN THE CARAVAN

NMHCA/NMCAL's Board of Directors invites you to join the caravan towards the 2026 Winter Conference, Navigating Disruption and Change, at the Embassy Suites in Albuquerque. A caravan is a group traveling together for mutual support, protection, and shared success, fostering collaboration, shared responsibilities, and progress as a unified team toward a common goal.

This year's theme highlights the shared journey through the many changes long-term care has seen in New Mexico and at the Federal level. The education will provide facility staff the opportunity to guide their teams along this journey and minimize disruptions.

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE



01

Tuesday March 17, 2026

8:30 am-10:00 am
Government Affairs

10:00-11:30
Board of Directors Meeting

11:00 am
Registration Desk Opens

12:00-1:30 pm
Membership Luncheon--
Members Only

1:30-3:00 pm
Concurrent Breakout Sessions

3:00-3:15 pm
Cold Beverage Break

3:15-4:45 pm
Concurrent Breakout Sessions

02

Wednesday March 18, 2026

7:30 – 8:00 am
Coffee and Rolls
Table Top Exhibits Open

8:00 – 9:30 am
General Session

9:30-10:00 am
Break
Table Top Exhibits
10:00 am - 10:30 am

10:30 am -12:00 pm
Concurrent Breakout Sessions

12:00-1:30 pm
Lunch
Table Tops Open

1:00-2:30 pm
Concurrent Breakout Sessions

2:30 - 3:00 pm
Break
Table Tops Open

3:00-4:30 pm
Concurrent Breakout Sessions

4:30-5:00 pm
Table Tops Open

03

Thursday March 19, 2026

8:00-8:30 am
Coffee and Rolls in the
Foyer

8:30-10:00 am
Concurrent Breakout
Session

10:00-10:30 am
Break on Your Own

10:30am-12:00 pm
Concurrent Breakout
Session



NMHCA is applying for continuing education credit for the professional disciplines listed below. The total possible continuing education contact hours that may be earned for attending the entire convention are 12.00.

ACT = Activity Directors,
NHA = Nursing Home Administrators
NRS = Nurses
SS = Social Workers
ALF = Assisted Living Administrators

The New Mexico Health Care Association (NMHCA) is recognized by the NM Nursing Home Administrators' Board as a provider of continuing education. NMHCA is the approval-granting body for continuing education for Activity Directors qualified through the NMHCA 36 or 40-Hour Basic Course for Activity Directors. NMHCA is also recognized by the NM Board of Nursing as a health care organization able to offer continuing education for nurses. Nurses must submit all appropriate paperwork regarding NMHCA courses directly to the NM Board of Nursing for re-licensure. The NM Board of Nursing may require a letter of justification explaining the applicability of the workshop/conference to the practice of nursing at the time of re-licensure.

TRACKING YOUR CE HOURS

NMHCA uses a scan system to verify attendance. You must have your name badge on to be scanned into a session. You will not be scanned in if you arrive more than 10 minutes late. If you leave early OR if you are absent for more than 10 minutes of the session, your scan will be canceled. Breaks have been built into the overall schedule to allow adequate time for phone calls, etc. No attendee will be permitted to request verification scans or to submit for credit on behalf of another individual. Certificates will be sent via email after the convention, usually taking about 3-4 weeks.

GENERAL CONVENTION INFORMATION

- For your own personal comfort, please bring a sweater or jacket with you to the conference. Adjusting the temperature in a meeting room takes time and is almost impossible to change immediately. Dressing in layers will help ensure that you will be neither too hot nor too cold.
- Please turn off all cell phones during education & business sessions to prevent distracting speakers and/or other participants.
- Evaluations are in the App for each session you attend. Please take a moment to complete it. Your input is essential for the continuing improvement of NMHCA's educational programs.
- Smoking is not permitted inside the event venues.

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

8:30 - 10:00 am

Government Affairs

10:00 am - 11:30 am

Board of Directors

10:00 am

Registration Desk Opens

12:00-1:30 pm

Membership Luncheon

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

NMHCA/NMCAL makes it easy to ensure your staff stays up to date on the latest in long-term care. The low registration fee includes all of your conference activities, including admission into all educational sessions, food and beverage when offered, and access to the tabletop exhibits. Please note that the membership meeting lunch is only available to 1 person from each member facility. Additional seats may be purchased for additional attendees from a member facility.

Please visit nmhca.org/signature-events and click on the Winter Conference registration link for pricing information.

Early-Bird Registration Deadline is March 7, 2026
Please Register Online at nmhca.org/signature-events

On-site registration at the Embassy Suites will begin at 10:00 am on Tuesday, March 17, 2026

We recommend assigning one person from your facility to pick up all name badges and distribute.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

It's a Winding Road: Navigating Customer Service

Patricia Whitacre, RN and Erin McKee

Customer service in a long-term care facility goes far beyond polite interactions—it means consistently delivering compassionate, responsive, and respectful care that honors the dignity and preferences of residents, families, and visitors. In this engaging session, you'll gain a clear definition of what exceptional customer service looks like in long-term care and explore practical tools to strengthen your team's capabilities, including structured communication techniques, proactive family rounding, streamlined complaint-resolution processes, and simple digital feedback systems. Join us to discover actionable steps that will help your facility stand out for its caring, high-quality service.

Table Top Exercise: Are ready for an Emergency? Part 1

John Hodges and Ken Gipson

In the unpredictable world of long-term care, disasters—whether natural, man-made, or health-related—can strike without warning, putting residents, staff, and operations at serious risk. This interactive Table Top Exercise brings your leadership team together in a realistic, no-pressure simulation to test and refine your emergency response plans in a guided, discussion-based format. Participants will walk through a detailed disaster scenario, make real-time decisions, identify gaps in communication, evacuation procedures, resource allocation, and resident safety protocols, and uncover strengths to build upon.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026

3:15 PM - 4:45 PM

Health Care Quality Surcharge

Holly Hester

This surcharge mechanism has proven effective in providing financial stability to nursing homes, reducing financial pressures, and enabling investments in staffing, training, and resident-centered care. Understanding HCQS is essential to maximizing reimbursement, maintaining compliance, and delivering exceptional quality. Join Holly Hester and others in this relevant session to stay on top of the revised program.

Table Top Exercise: Are ready for an Emergency? Part 2

John Hodges and Ken Gipson

In the unpredictable world of long-term care, disasters—whether natural, man-made, or health-related—can strike without warning, putting residents, staff, and operations at serious risk. This interactive Table Top Exercise brings your leadership team together in a realistic, no-pressure simulation to test and refine your emergency response plans in a guided, discussion-based format. Participants will walk through a detailed disaster scenario, make real-time decisions, identify gaps in communication, evacuation procedures, resource allocation, and resident safety protocols, and uncover strengths to build upon.

Behaviors Equal UnMet Needs

Patricia Whitacre, RN

Join Pat to learn to identify the common unmet needs that lead to undesirable behaviors. She will examine contributing factors to behaviors that can be impacted right away to help reduce the power struggles and promote a more positive care environment. Together, you will explore tools to proactively anticipate resident preferences and communicate information to all staff members.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

PLENARY SESSION

The 7 Pillars of Wellbeing: Sustainable Framework for Healthcare Providers

Lawrence Herrera and Jose Maresma

Healthcare professionals are exceptional at caring for others—but often at the cost of their own well-being. This keynote introduces a powerful, science-backed 7-Pillar Framework designed specifically to support resilience, nervous system health, and sustainable performance in high-stress medical environments. Participants will leave inspired, grounded, and equipped with practical strategies they can begin using immediately—without adding more to an already full plate. This is not self-care as another obligation, but self-care as a professional imperative.



EDUCATION SESSIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Regulate, Restore, Perform: Practical Tools for Stress Reduction and Daily Vitality **Jose Maresma and Lawrence Herrera**

This experiential, hands-on session translates science into practice, offering healthcare professionals practical tools to regulate stress, restore energy, and build daily routines that actually fit real lives. Participants will learn evidence-based techniques for nervous system regulation, design personalized morning and evening practices, and experience simple, no-equipment movement routines that support both mental and physical resilience. This session is interactive, embodied, and immediately applicable & designed to leave participants feeling calmer, clearer, and more capable. Expect to move, breathe, reflect, and leave with a plan.

End of Life Options

Julie Bergen M.Ed.; Debbie Armstrong, JD; Sherry Burns; Katelynn Martin; and NancyAbell

End of Life Options New Mexico (EOLONM) will provide an overview of the 2021 Elizabeth Whitefield End-of-Life Options Act that authorizes medical aid in dying in New Mexico. A panel of experts will discuss the roles and responsibilities of prescribing clinicians, some case studies reflecting how aid in dying actually works, the range of involvements by hospice organizations, and the legal and ethical responsibilities and interface with residential facilities regarding residents wishing to consider assisted dying. There will be ample time for Q&A and audience discussion, perhaps leading to a work group to develop information and guidelines on medical aid in dying for residential facilities.

Strengthening Your Approach to Infection Control in Assisted Living

Bonnie Zeiler, BA, LPN, CDP

Join Bonnie to discuss how to seamlessly integrate the ICP Pathway into your facility's existing infection control program. Designed to empower assisted living leaders and teams, this practical session equips you to strengthen your approaches to infection control—promoting the health, safety, and well-being of residents and staff while delivering exceptional quality care.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM

Division of Health Improvement - Nursing Facility Session

Nancy Laster, DNP, MBA; Maurella Sooh, MSW

Join this high-impact conference session featuring Division of Health Improvement (DHI) staff for an exclusive, insider discussion on the most common citations seen in nursing facilities, with special emphasis on Immediate Jeopardy findings and how to prevent them. Gain practical strategies to strengthen your compliance program, improve survey outcomes, and foster a culture of proactive quality care.

Assisted Living Reg Overview

Bonnie Zeiler, BA, LPN, CDP; Olivia Romero

Join this must-attend conference session for a clear, concise overview of the most recent revised state regulations impacting assisted living operations. Our Assisted Living Task Force Co-Chairs will break down key changes—highlighting practical implications for your facility's policies, training programs, and day-to-day practices—while drawing on the latest insights from national reports and state-level developments. This isn't just a lecture—it's your opportunity to get answers. Bring your questions, scenarios, and challenges for an interactive live Q&A segment designed to address real-world applications and clarify uncertainties.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Division of Health Improvement - Assisted Living Session

Nancy Laster, DNP, MBA; Maurella Sooh, MSW; Valerie Cordova, MBA

Join this high-impact conference session featuring Division of Health Improvement (DHI) staff for an exclusive, insider discussion on the most common citations seen in assisted living facilities. Gain practical strategies to strengthen your compliance program, improve survey outcomes, and foster a culture of proactive quality care.

Digital Advanced Care Planning: Increasing Provider Utilization and Adoption

Phillip Gibbs and Ruben Vasquez

Advance Care Planning documentation is underutilized. Hospital staff report that ACP documentation is hidden, inconsistent, or invalid. When ACP documentation is accessible, patients are more likely to receive care aligned with personal values and goals, which may lead to increased patient satisfaction. It can also reduce hospital admissions, ICU utilization, and hospital deaths, while increasing hospice use.

There are insufficient institutional resources to properly engage vulnerable patients. Clinicians are more likely to engage in ACP when using single-sign-on technology, leading to greater clinician adoption. When signers can complete documents with patients using mobile signature technology, it streamlines the process for busy clinicians.

EDUCATION SESSIONS

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026

8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

From Vision to Practice: How Leadership Shapes Infection Prevention Success in Long-Term Care

Shannon Cupka and Ruth Healy

As a leader, have you ever wondered what is involved in overseeing and supporting your facility's infection prevention and control (IPC) program? Or how to help your IPC team when the inevitable problem arises? This session will address how leaders and infection preventionists can work together to drive a culture of safety with a robust IPC program.

Severe Mental Illness and Behaviors

Brandon Chuma and Kristina Kovacs

The presentation reviews common mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder (etiology, prevalence, and presentation), behaviors associated with these presentations, and nonpharmacological interventions to work with residents who have these disorders to prevent escalation and return to acute.

Board of Nursing: CMA

Sheena Ferguson

The session will offer insight into planned changes to CMA rules and highlight the most commonly cited issues during the CMA program survey visits. This is your chance to talk directly and clarify the implications for your facility's compliance. Bring your questions for an interactive deep dive—don't miss this timely session to ensure your team is fully informed, compliant, and ready for what's next. Secure your spot today!

EDUCATION SESSIONS

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026

8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

Wound Care Management: All About Pressure Injury Documentation to Protect the Nursing Facility **Payam Tehrani, MD**

Pressure injuries are among the most cited deficiencies under CMS F686, often resulting in hefty penalties, Immediate Jeopardy tags, and legal risk when prevention or documentation falls short. Facilities must prove injuries were unavoidable and care met professional standards—strong, consistent records are your best defense. This focused session covers the essentials of pressure injury management. Walk away with practical tools and strategies to strengthen your wound care program, reduce preventable injuries, ensure survey compliance, and safeguard your facility and residents.

Life Safety Code **Rhonda Delmain, BS-Psy, BS-Ed, MAML, CFI**

In this practical, eye-opening session, we'll spotlight the most common Life Safety Code findings currently observed during surveys, explain why they happen so frequently, and share proven strategies to identify, correct, and prevent them before surveyors arrive.

Antipsychotic Medications in Assisted Living **Bonnie Zeiler**

Antipsychotics are often used off-label to try to reduce agitation and other behaviors in residents with dementia. Studies, however, have found that their use can contribute to accelerated cognitive decline and an increased risk of stroke, pneumonia, and death. Join Bonnie to discuss how you can reduce the use of antipsychotic medications in your residents.

Speakers

Nancy Abell

Nancy Abell has lived in New Mexico for thirty years. She served for many years on the board of PMS Hospice. In 2012, she and her husband attended the planned death of her husband's brother in Portland, OR. It was a transformative experience for her, and she returned to New Mexico and began advocating for the same option for New Mexicans – an effort that took nine years to accomplish! Nancy now Chairs the EOLONM Clinical Outreach and Education Committee as well as serving as the Clinical Outreach and Client Services Advisor to the Board of Directors

Debbie Armstrong

Debbie Armstrong served four terms as the State Representative for House District 17 (Bernalillo County) from 2015 – 2022. Among the bills she sponsored in the NM Legislature were the 2017 End-of-Life Options Acts (HB 171), the 2019 (HB 90) and the 2021 (HB 47) Elizabeth Whitefield End-of-Life Options Act. She successfully shepherded the 2021 legislation through the House and on to final approval in the Senate. Debbie serves as President of Delta Management Group, Inc. a small business specializing in association and non-profit management. In that capacity, she serves as Executive Director of the New Mexico Medical Insurance Pool, a legislatively created safety-net program that provides subsidized health insurance for people with high-risk medical conditions. Debbie has a B.S. in Physical Therapy from the University of Michigan and received her J.D. from the University of New Mexico Law School. On a personal note, Debbie has an adult daughter with childhood-onset metastatic thyroid cancer, an experience that has linked her to families across the state struggling with serious, life-threatening medical concerns. She hopes to bring not only her personal and professional experience with death and dying but also her long history of relationships with the medical community, state government and the legislature to her service with EOLONM.

Julia Bergen M.Ed.

Julia is excited to be joining the EOLONM team to increase awareness and understanding about individuals' options and choices regarding end of life – essential and practical steps leading to peace of mind for individuals, families and loved ones. With over twenty years of experience as a leader of regional New Mexico education/social justice organizations, Julia brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to EOLONM. A seasoned fundraiser, Julia has raised more than \$20 million during the course of her career creating robust public/private revenue strategies designed to sustain the social change work about which she is passionate. A highly motivated and compassionate leader, she has built an impressive skill set that includes strategic planning, marketing and communications, program management, staff development, grant writing and fundraising. Julia holds a Masters in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Bachelor of Arts in Literature and Art History from SUNY's Purchase College.

Sherry Burns

After retiring as a director for a medical software company, Sherry was inspired by the growing shift in Western culture towards reclaiming ownership of the death journey and became an end-of-life doula. She completed her doula training through the University of Vermont, Larner College of Medicine. As a doula, Sherry explores the profound cultural, spiritual, and emotional aspects of this sacred journey as she companions her clients. She hosts death cafés, owns a Facebook group titled End-of-Life Doulas for Progressive Legislation Changes, and volunteers as an EOLONM Board Member and Client Support Team Leader with End of Life Options New Mexico. Supporting New Mexicans, through the EOLONM organization, as they create their own self-directed transition and accompanying them on their journey is a humbling privilege.

Speakers

Brandon Chuman, PsyD

Originally from Illinois, Dr. Brandon Chuman relocated to Las Vegas in 2021 and currently serves as the Chief of Neuropsychology at Behavioral Health Solutions. His professional journey is both diverse and dynamic. Prior to pursuing psychology, Dr. Chuman worked in graphic design, served as a helicopter flight nurse, and spent four years as an EMT during his undergraduate studies. An injury during his time as an EMT led him to explore psychology, sparking a deep interest in trauma-related fields, including burnout and PTSD. He earned his doctorate from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology in Los Angeles in 2014 and became a licensed psychologist in 2016. Dr. Chuman joined BHS in September 2021, bringing with him a unique blend of clinical expertise and real-world experience.

Shannon Cupka

Shannon Cupka is a Patient Safety Manager at Comagine Health, managing initiatives to improve care quality, performance measures and clinical outcomes. Shannon has an extensive advocacy background, working with vulnerable and underserved individuals in community-based and long-term care settings, and convening stakeholder coalitions to address care gaps and systems issues. She has a master's degree in counseling psychology and more than twenty years' experience with geriatric and behavioral health populations as a direct care provider, clinician, advocate, consultant and trainer. Over the past few years Shannon has coordinated infection prevention initiatives across five states supporting a variety of healthcare settings.

Rhonda Delmain BS-Psy, BS-Ed, MAML, CFI

Rhonda is the Bureau Chief, Division of Health Improvement, District Operations Bureau

Sheena Ferguson, DNP, RN, FANA-I

Sheena Ferguson is the Executive Director for the NM Board of Nursing. She was a CNO at University of NM Hospitals . She received her MSN in 1988 and her DNP in 2021, both from UNM.

Phillip Gibbs

Phillip Gibbs is the Customer Engagement Director at SYNCRONYS, managing all areas of customer relations, network management and business development. He and his team engage with partners statewide to ensure SYNCRONYS is positioned to meet the interoperability needs of the healthcare community at large.

Beginning his career as a mental health technician, Phil has built a diverse background in healthcare over the last 19 years, including experience in hospital, clinic, and managed care operations, revenue cycle management, and business development. Phil earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Adams State University in Colorado and a master's degree in healthcare administration from Louisiana State University-Shreveport.

Phil has a passion for process improvement, reducing administrative burden, and continuous collaboration across sectors to create a more efficient and resourceful healthcare delivery system.

Ruth Healy

Ruth Healy is a CIC-certified Infection Control Epidemiologist at the New Mexico Department of Health with over 10 years of experience in healthcare infection prevention and control. Her current work focuses on supporting healthcare facilities across the state in implementing evidence-based practices to prevent and control healthcare-associated infections. With a background in public health and epidemiology, Ruth brings extensive experience in infection prevention, outbreak response, healthcare system collaboration, and quality improvement.

Speakers

John Hodges

John Hodges has a diverse background in emergency preparedness and healthcare. John has held various roles such as Emergency Preparedness Coordinator at Artesia General Hospital, Event Medic at Lightning Extreme EMC, Paramedic at eCareGroup PLLC, and Tech II at Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Hospital. With their extensive experience as an Emergency Medical Technician at Montgomery County Hospital District, John currently serves as the Healthcare Preparedness and Response Section Manager at the New Mexico Department of Health. John is dedicated to providing support for healthcare coalitions and facilities in New Mexico

Kristina Kovacs, Chief Clinical Officer

Kristi Kovacs has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and is the Co-Founder and Chief Clinical Officer for Behavioral Health Solutions (BHS). At BHS she oversees a team of mental health professionals specializing in the care of patients residing in skilled nursing facilities with behavioral and emotional challenges and directs the administration of a reimbursement program for residents with behavioral issues. Kristi has an extensive research background investigating antecedents to chemical dependency and reduction of recidivism through evaluation of prison reentry programs but has now directed her efforts toward behavioral interventions for cognitively challenged adults.

Katelynn Martin

Katelynn Martin, Director of High Desert Hospice and daughter of Sarah Crutchfield, was raised in a household with a heart for hospice! Katelynn has shared her mother's vision and passion for hospice since she was very young. Katelynn began as a hospice and assisted living volunteer when she was just 8 years old and has always known that she would someday be making a life long career out of serving in the hospice community. Katelynn has two children that keep her and her husband very busy. Her family also includes her 2 french bulldogs, her American Bully and her sons bearded dragon affectionately named Optimus Prime. You can often find Katelynn's family outside playing or working with Dad in the shop. Katelynn can be found curled up with a good book in her spare time or advocating for her autistic children and assisting with their program involvement. She is in the process of opening an ABA therapy clinic to continue serving the community and meeting the needs of children and families here in Albuquerque. Along with Katelynn's dedication to her position as Executive Director for High Desert Hospice, she is also very committed to her position as Director for the MAiD program.

Erin McKee

Erin is a licensed Nursing Home Administrator with over eight years of experience in skilled nursing and long-term care. I have held leadership roles in administration, social services, HR, and clinical operations, and is known for creating calm, productive environments that support both residents and staff. I hold a bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico and am dedicated to delivering exceptional care and operational excellence. Winning awards that include 2024 Administrator of the Year for the NM/WA Market, 2023 Bronze Quality Award, 2025 Silver Quality Award and is the 2025 New Mexico Representative for the American Health Care Association Future Leader.

Speakers

Payam Tehrani, MD

Dr. Payam Tehrani is CEO and President of SNF Wound Care. He is a Wound Care Specialist who is also certified in Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy. Previously a Hospitalist/Internist who did residency in Internal Medicine. Dr. Tehrani began his internist/hospitalist career at Long Beach Memorial Hospital which was named as one of "America's Best Hospitals" by U.S. News & World Report magazine. It was at Long Beach Memorial Hospital that early on in his career, Dr. Tehrani was introduced to the well known Orthopedic Surgeon, Dr. Michael Strauss, who has been practicing wound care for many years. Dr. Tehrani was fortunate to work alongside Dr. Strauss where Dr. Tehrani developed his passion and expertise in wound care, and in 2017 began operating SNF Wound Care, a wound healing program which services patients who are in need of wound and skin care for residing at nursing facilities in the greater Los Angeles area which has now evolved across the country.

Patricia Whitacre

Pat Whitacre, RN, is the Clinical and Quality Director for the New Mexico Health Care Association/New Mexico Center for Assisted Living. She has worked as a Director of Nursing in nursing facilities and in assisted living facilities as both a facility nurse and corporate nurse.

Bonnie Zeiler

Bonnie Zeiler has been a nurse for more than 20 years. She is a Certified Dementia Practitioner and is the Administrator at Northrise Assisted Living (previously The Village at Northrise). Bonnie was awarded the National Nurse of the Year Award in 2015 from the National Center for Assisted Living and the NM Best of the Best Nurse Manager in 2012 from the NM Health Care Association. She served NM as the NCAL State Leader for more than 10 years, and is currently the Assisted Living Task Force Co-chair but served as the chair for more than 10 years.

