



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

*101 Israel Road S.E • Olympia, Washington 98504*

March 25, 2024

Dear Provider/Administrator,

We at the Washington State Department of Health recognize that the current credentialing backlogs for both nursing assistants and home care aides is causing hardships for skilled nursing, assisted living, and other home and community-based care settings, as well as those individuals attempting to become credentialled.

The backlog is, in large part, a result of waivers put into place during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The waivers allowed home care aides and nursing assistants to continue working past the 200-day limit in home and community-based care settings such as adult family homes and assisted living facilities or 120 days in skilled nursing facilities, without completing the credentialing process. Currently, the pending home care aide applications include individuals who applied as early as 2020, who are moving through processes under the COVID-19 public health emergency rules. Pending nursing assistant certified applications are being processed for initial review approximately 60 days after submission.

The Department of Health agrees the nursing assistant and home care aide workforce is critical to Washingtonians and the vulnerable adults served in long term care facilities and we are focused on addressing the credentialing backlog for these critical and important professions. A large portion of the legislative funding appropriated for credentialing in fiscal year 2024 is currently being directed to make improvements to credentialing processes. Changes include adding additional staffing, development of improved performance measures, and organizational changes to better align with efficient and expedient process changes.

We are working closely with our partners at DSHS and with contracted training and testing providers to make improvements to the larger system. Planned improvements include:

#### Home Care Aide Certification:

- Credentialing team increasing from seven to twenty-three staff dedicated to processing applications.
- Automatic approval of home care aide applicants to test as soon as the application is received, and the ability of applicants to self-schedule testing during their training.
- Adding four additional home care aide testing sites across the state to improve access.
- Forming a workgroup that will pilot moving the home care aide exam into the training programs.
- Forming a workgroup that will revise the home care aide skills exam to make it more relevant for working home care aides and to assist in capturing knowledge to potentially increase pass rates.

#### Nursing Assistant Certification:

- Credentialing team increasing from eight to twelve staff that are dedicated to processing applications.

- Eliminating the requirement that applicants must take and pass the NNAAP skills exam before submitting a certification application.
- Extended work on the skills exam location options, and improving score result transferability.

We are confident these measures will bring significant improvements to the credentialing timelines for over the next several months.

In the meantime, we encourage both nursing assistant and home care aide applicants to submit their applications online, rather than paper applications. Online applications can be processed faster than paper applications, therefore reducing wait times. Nursing assistant certified applicants are encouraged to complete their application at the same time that they register with Credentia for the written and skills testing to allow for simultaneous processing.

The Department of Health may be able to help move forward applications for those individuals that are within two weeks of their credentialing deadline if their application was submitted at the time of hire and is complete with all required documentation. For assistance with this, please contact:

- Home Care Aide Program at [HomeCareAide@doh.wa.gov](mailto:HomeCareAide@doh.wa.gov) or 360-236-2700.
- Nursing Assistant Program at [HSQARReview4@doh.wa.gov](mailto:HSQARReview4@doh.wa.gov) or 360-236-2700.

Additionally, we would like to provide you with some information on the DOH HELMS project:

**What is HELMS?** Healthcare Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS) is a new electronic licensing system that will replace the outdated system currently in use and will match the growing requirements and expectations of customers.

**What are the benefits?** HELMS will expand the online capabilities for health care providers, facility operations, educational programs, and the public. There will be greater access to Department of Health data, as well as faster transmission of information using electronic mail and websites. For example, HELMS will:

- Modernize credentialing services, processes, and capabilities.
- Expand mobile capabilities for the professions and the public.

**When is HELMS launching?** The first release, HELMS Lite, is scheduled to launch on **4/24/2024**. It will replace the system used for our initial application process. This will improve the new applicant's experience with the ability to submit applications from their mobile device, update their profile information, delete draft applications, view their application status online, and print payment confirmation. Additional HELMS releases with improved functionality are scheduled through December 2025.

**For more information, please visit our [website](#), sign-up for [Gov Delivery Bulletins](#) (Subscription topic: HELMS) or email us at [HELMS@doh.wa.gov](mailto:HELMS@doh.wa.gov).**

We appreciate your patience as we work diligently to improve our credentialing processes and timelines for these important health care workers and their patients and residents.

Sincerely,

/s/ Shawna Fox  
Shawna Fox  
Director, Office of Health Professions  
Washington State Department of Health