



STATE OF WASHINGTON

November 18, 2016

The Honorable Troy Kelley
Washington State Auditor
P.O. Box 40021
Olympia, WA 98504-0021

Dear Auditor Kelley:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the State Auditor's Office (SAO) performance audit report, "Barriers to Home Care Aide Certification." The Office of Financial Management worked with the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to provide this response.

We appreciate the report's recognition that both agencies have been addressing barriers since the program's inception and acknowledgment of the improvements made following the Initiative 1163 performance audit published in 2014. We also appreciate the auditors' efforts to survey a sample of long-term care workers who did not obtain home-care certification to provide additional information to consider as we move forward.

DOH and DSHS agree with the SAO's recommendations and will continue to work closely together, and with our partners, to identify and address barriers to home-care aide certification.

DOH addressed the non-English pass rate disparity by working with stakeholders to design a new certification exam that assesses content knowledge, rather than literacy or test-taking skills. Subject-matter experts were engaged to write and review new questions, review the translations, and help set the minimum passing score. The exam went live in May 2016. Pass rates for non-English test takers have increased by 30 percent, with the lowest-performing languages seeing the greatest improvement.

DOH also worked with the testing vendor to combine the DOH credential and certification exam applications into one form, effective May 1, 2016. Applicants now complete a single form and submit it to DOH. DOH then electronically notifies the testing vendor when applicants are eligible to take the exam. This streamlined process reduces paperwork and applicant wait time for testing after completing training.

Sincerely,

David Schumacher
Director
Office of Financial Management

John Wiesman
Secretary
Department of Health

Patricia K. Lashway
Acting Secretary
Department of Social & Health Services

cc: David Postman, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Matt Steuerwalt, Executive Director of Policy, Office of the Governor
Roselyn Marcus, Assistant Director, Office of Financial Management
Scott Merriman, Legislative Liaison, Office of Financial Management
Rich Roesler, Acting Director, Results Washington, Office of the Governor
Tammy Firkins, Performance Audit Liaison, Results Washington, Office of the Governor

This coordinated management response to the State Auditor’s Office (SAO) performance audit report received on October 31, 2016, is provided by the Office of Financial Management, the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

SAO PERFORMANCE AUDIT OBJECTIVES:

The SAO designed the audit to answer:

1. What barriers do home care aide applicants face in completing the certification process?
 2. What improvements can be made to help more people complete the process?
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SAO Conclusion: Although the agencies (DSHS & DOH) and their partners have made improvements to the process since the implementation of Initiative-1163, some applicants still face barriers and drop out of the process.

SAO Finding: Stronger efforts to make it easier for applicants to complete the process, such as making access to training and the exam more accessible and addressing challenges for limited English proficiency applicants, could improve completion rates for the home care aide certification program.

SAO Recommendation 1: DOH and DSHS work with the Training Partnership to review data on the languages applicants request interpreters for to determine if they need to expand the number of languages currently available for training and the exam.

STATE RESPONSE: DOH analyzed the interpreter requests received by the Training Partnership for training and those DOH received for the certification exam. More than one-third of all individual interpreter requests are for Amharic. Because of this volume, it costs less to translate the exam than to continue providing individual interpreters. All other languages have significantly smaller volumes, so it is more cost efficient to provide individual interpreters.

DSHS agrees with the recommendation and will continue to work with the Training Partnership to determine if the number of languages currently available for training needs to be expanded.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- DOH will continue to monitor language requests on a monthly basis. *Ongoing.*
 - DSHS will continue to work with the Training Partnership to determine the need to expand the number of languages currently available for training. *Ongoing.*
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SAO Recommendation 2: DOH and DSHS work with their partners to emphasize the importance of taking the exam on the scheduled date.

STATE RESPONSE: DOH agrees with the recommendation and plans to update both the website and the authorization for test notifications sent to applicants to emphasize the importance of taking the exam on the scheduled date.

DSHS agrees with the recommendation and will continue to emphasize the importance of taking the exam on the scheduled date through the training programs and other communications to individual providers and contractors who hire long-term care workers.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- DOH will update the website and the authorization to test notifications sent to applicants to emphasize the importance of taking the exam on the scheduled date. *By January 31, 2017.*
 - DSHS will ask the training programs to emphasize to their students the importance of taking the exam on their scheduled date. *By January 31, 2017*
 - DSHS will update communications for individual providers, home care agency employers/staff, adult family homes and assisted living providers/staff to emphasize the importance of applicants taking the Prometric exam on the first scheduled date to reduce the time frame between curriculum completion and test taking. *By January 31, 2017*
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SAO Recommendation 3: DSHS continue to work with the Training Partnership and community instructors to increase training locations and adopt flexible schedules.

STATE RESPONSE: DSHS agrees with the recommendation and will continue to work with the Training Partnership and community instructors to expand training locations and flexible schedules.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- DSHS will continue to work with the Training Partnership and community instructors to expand the number of training locations and adopt flexible schedules. *Ongoing.*
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SAO Recommendation 4: DOH work to reduce the distances applicants have to travel by working with its test provider, Prometric, to increase the number of testing sites in the state.

STATE RESPONSE: DOH agrees with the recommendation and has been working with Prometric since 2015 to add test sites, with emphasis on the Yakima area. Sites in that area are being evaluated and discussions are underway with site owners. In addition to those efforts, Prometric opened a new test site in Federal Way in October 2016 and is opening a site in Kent in November 2016.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- DOH will work with Prometric to add test sites, with emphasis in the Yakima area. *Ongoing.*
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