



# In the **SPOTLIGHT** Inside MDHHS with Amy Epkey

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HCAM DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Amy Epkey is the Senior Deputy Director for Financial Operations Administration within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). She oversees the department's budget, contracts and grants, finance and accounting, audit functions and financial support services for information technology.

Amy is HCAM's contact point for funding and other financial issues. She works with HCAM on policy and process changes to best assist long-term care facilities and residents across the state.

Before joining MDHHS in 2022, Epkey served as Senior Deputy Director for the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. Prior to that, she worked for the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, where she served as a policy advisor. She graduated from Grand Valley State University with a bachelor of business administration.

**Q Give us a big picture overview of your job:**  
I oversee the department's \$35 billion budget, so I make sure we are providing necessary financial support to long-term care facilities. Being able to help others is what called me to public service, and I see value in collectively figuring out solutions. I always look for your members' input and suggestions and like to collaborate with stakeholders.

**Q Do you have any personal experience with long-term care facilities?**  
One of the things that drew me to this position was my experience with my grandma moving into a nursing facility after she suffered a stroke. Seeing the high level of care she received was very touching. The individuals working with her really got to know her and our family. Moving into a care facility is a difficult situation. To see a nursing facility team truly care for residents and treat them with so much respect spoke to me personally. The people who work in long-term care have tough jobs. They are really all about selflessly serving others, and my grandma received such great care.

**Q What department initiatives supporting nursing facilities did you help implement?**  
The department's major priorities have been to make sure we have initiatives to help strengthen the workforce. We have had a number of grants focused on recruitment, training and retention to really build frontline workers.

We have also really focused on improving our processes to make sure they are streamlined and as transparent to facilities as possible. One improvement we've made to streamline the audit process is to simplify the information our auditors use. In the past, our auditors had lots of pages of information to refer to when they were at a facility looking at whether something was eligible for coverage. Now, we instead give them an executive summary, which is easier to review and understand.

We also work to make sure our auditors have more of a dialog with the facilities. Obviously, facilities have frontline workers interacting with residents. They know better than we do what residents need, so talking with facilities helps us better understand how we can best provide that financial support and have policies and processes that align with what facilities need.

**Q Have you noticed improvements since you streamlined and made changes?**  
Yes. Providers have made really good recommendations. For example, historically there might have been individuals in the facility to coordinate resident travel to or from the hospital. However, today the facility might instead bring on an independent contractor who can better oversee the process. Because that practice wasn't in our policy, it would have been considered disallowed. So we worked with staff to say OK, how do we make sure we are allowing support for financial needs in a changing environment. We want to be able to support facilities as providers find creative approaches to best care for residents.

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**Q The direct care and non-clinical worker wage pass through program has proven very beneficial to a facility's recruitment and retention efforts. Do you foresee this program continuing?**

Yes, the increases are built in to the ongoing budget so we anticipate those being maintained into the future. While we know the wage increase isn't a magic approach to strengthening the workforce, it is an important one. So it is one of our top priorities in terms of providing support for facilities to meet the workforce challenges.

**Q MDHHS is working with stakeholders, including HCAM, to develop and implement a new nursing facility Medicaid reimbursement system. Can you provide an update on that?**

Going through this process reminded us how important it is to have more regular communication with all stakeholders.

We recognized that we had some gaps in our processes and wanted to make sure we addressed all of those first. It's one of those things where once you start to work on it, you realize there's a lot more to it than you may have initially thought. So it's been really helpful to identify some of the pain points in the process and work through those as a first step in getting a new reimbursement system.

**Q Give us a glimpse into the personal side of your life.**

I've been married for almost 23 years. My husband is a fantastic stay-at-home dad. We have 5 children — four daughters and a son, who range in age from 8 to 22. A lot of my time is spent with family. I also very much enjoy running, biking, camping and just being outdoors in general. When we can, we like to travel throughout the state, taking advantage of everything Michigan has to offer like spending time in the U.P. or taking trips to Lake Michigan.