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## Meet Thelma

### Health Care Association of Michigan Unveils Information Campaign

LANSING, MI – With a mission to promote excellence in senior care, the Health Care Association of Michigan (HCAM) recently launched a multimedia informational campaign to keep nursing facility and assisted living residents top of mind in Michigan.

“The first Baby Boomers will turn 80 in 2026 — that’s less than three years from now,” said Melissa Samuel, president and CEO of HCAM, which represents over 640 long-term care facilities across the state. “The aging of Michigan presents challenges for elderly residents and their families, as well as policymakers, employees, employers and others today and in the years to come. It’s crucial that we support our seniors as laws, regulations and funding that impact long-term care are put in place.”

HCAM’s informational campaign, “Meet Thelma,” celebrates seniors and others who rely on skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities to provide the care they need to thrive in the safest, most appropriate environment based on their care needs.

Thelma characterizes the typical resident living in a long-term care setting — a female in her mid-eighties. She represents the more than 100,000 residents in Michigan’s long-term care facilities. “As our spokesperson, Thelma will carry our message that strong, viable nursing facilities and assisted living communities are must-have options for Michigan’s seniors.”

The Meet Thelma campaign speaks to legislators, government officials, HCAM members and the public through several channels including social media, emails, newsletters, magazine articles, website postings and events. The goal of the ongoing campaign is to increase awareness and drive engagement with these audiences.

Central to the campaign is Thelma herself, personified as both a plush doll and a cardboard cutout. “We’re in the process of delivering Thelma to all 148 Michigan legislators,” said Samuel. “Our hope is that legislators will keep her in their offices as a daily reminder that seniors and other vulnerable Michiganders count on them to create laws that ensure access to quality care as we age. This connection is vital because the skilled nursing profession is intricately tied to state government.”

Funded through Medicaid and Medicare appropriations, skilled nursing providers are one of the most highly regulated sectors, operating under the guidance of more than 1,000 state and federal regulations. Long-term care facilities are a common thread throughout every community; and a core government responsibility is to ensure that 24-hour, quality, skilled nursing care remains an option for all citizens.

The campaign includes a “Did You Know?” component where the association regularly emails state legislators quick facts about long-term care in our state. “We share relevant information and statistics to bolster the Legislature’s understanding of this complicated but vital care system,” said Samuel. “Our goal is to strengthen our partnership with policymakers to ensure that we prioritize our aging population and that long-term care facilities remain viable. Thelma helps amplify that message.”

The campaign is also designed to link legislators with long-term care providers. Thelma is delivered with a customized list of the nursing facilities and assisted living communities in each legislator’s district. “Not only do our members provide essential services to Michigan residents, they also contribute to our state and nation’s economic health,” said Samuel. “They are VIP job providers across the state; and in rural communities, nursing facilities are often the largest employer.”

To keep the momentum and engagement going, a second leg of the campaign will launch this summer. “Soon you will be able to follow Thelma’s adventures on Facebook, and she’s getting her own Instagram,” said Samuel. “Our long-term care members play a valuable role in caring for our state’s most vulnerable population — including seniors like Thelma. We hope our campaign will help people make an emotional connection with long-term care issues and the growing number of people to whom skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities are vitally important.”



Health Care Association of Michigan

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