

HOME CARE: BECAUSE THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Home care continues to be the answer to caring for sick and disabled loved ones because of the increased demand on health care providers, personal preference, increased public awareness of the availability of home care services, new technology and added cost-effectiveness of home health care. It is for this reason that we celebrate National Home Care Month and embrace the theme, “Home Care: Because there is No Place Like Home.” Here are some ways your agency can recognize this special month.

Your National Home Care Month campaign should be designed to reach a variety of audiences with your message about the essential role of home care. Whether you are targeting consumers, physicians, staff, or elected officials, this section will provide you with creative and affordable ideas to spread your message.

PROMOTE AWARENESS AMONG POTENTIAL CONSUMERS

The key to successfully educating consumers is capturing community interest with programs and materials that are informative, well targeted, and fulfill a consumer need.

The following are some NHM celebration ideas designed to target and educate consumers:

- Launch a ribbon wearing campaign promoting NHM. Pass out ribbons that can be pinned on clothing to show support for home care and its pivotal role in the end-of-life movement.
- Host an open house to bring new people into your office and to provide you with the opportunity to answer questions they may have about home care.
- Coordinate a “Walking Home” walk-a-thon to raise funds for low-income individuals who need home care services. Charge an entrance fee to participate in the walk-a-thon and ask a local TV station, radio station, or another local organization to sponsor the event. Offer event participants T-shirts with their entry fees.
- Display banners and billboards announcing NHM throughout your community. Major intersections and hospital entrances provide prime target areas.
- Organize a silent auction to raise community funds. Try to obtain a variety of commonly donated items, such as artwork, hotel accommodations, rounds of golf, restaurant certificates, and gift baskets.
- Construct NHM bulletin boards or information booths at your local hospitals, shopping centers, and health departments with general information about home care. See Sample Materials to Get You Started for examples of information you can provide.
- Work with your local public libraries to feature books and other educational materials about home care. Provide special bookmarks highlighting the NHM theme.
- Organize a resource fair and a seminar series for your community’s informal caregivers with information about the resources they can turn to for respite and support.
- Visit residents of retirement communities and provide them with general information about home care services and tips for finding and financing the highest quality care.
- Ask local corporations and public utility companies to print and insert home care information in their November bills.
- Distribute brochures, fliers, and posters about home care services to local libraries, churches, pharmacies, retail outlets, etc. See the Fact Sheet in Sample Materials to Get Your Started for flier ideas.

- Provide videos describing home care services to local video stores that offer “free video” community-service racks.
- Organize a city-hall reception and news conference to announce a mayoral NHM proclamation.

SHOW APPRECIATION FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

No NHM celebration would be complete without recognizing the home care team’s dedicated staff and volunteers. Let these important people know how much you appreciate the physical and emotional support they provide for patients and their families.

- Following are some easy ways to say “thank you:”
- Consider honoring the different types of home care providers and their areas of specialty on specific days or weeks in November.
- Enlist the help of local businesses in placing a public service announcement or paid advertisement with your local television or radio stations and newspapers, announcing NHM and thanking your agency’s employees and volunteers.
- Ask patients and their families to sign a giant “thank you” card for staff and volunteers.
- Distribute cookies or other treats with a special message thanking personnel for their time and commitment.
- Post a message in your company’s e-mail system and on its paycheck stubs or envelopes thanking your staff and wishing them a happy home care month.
- Honor your employees and volunteers with special gifts, such as T-shirts, coffee mugs, and bags honoring the importance of home care.
- Create an in-house bulletin board profiling each of your employees and volunteers.
- Host an “Employee and Volunteer of the Year” awards event, recognizing the top staff members from each division of your organization.
- Host a breakfast, luncheon, picnic, or banquet honoring all of your employees and volunteers. Invite patients and their families, public officials, and your board of directors to come and show their appreciation.

STRENGTHEN RELATIONS WITH PHYSICIANS AND OTHER REFERRAL SOURCES

- NHM also provides a valuable opportunity for you to promote greater awareness of your services and understanding of home care among local physicians and other referral sources. This target audience includes private third-party payers, government agencies, and health facilities and professionals.
- Distribute home care informational packets to all appropriate physicians.
- Let them know that your agency’s staff members are available to visit the doctor’s office to work under the physician’s supervision, learning his or her protocols and practice style.
- Provide them with copies of the thank-you letters your agency receives from patients and family members who have benefited from home care.
- Provide physicians with a subscription of your newsletter. If you don’t have a newsletter, consider creating a quarterly publication designed specifically for physicians, educating them on the latest developments and advances in home care.

- Present a “Physician of the Year” award to the physician who has been the most supportive of home care in the medical community.
- Offer to help establish or teach a home care curriculum at area medical schools. If this is not an option, volunteer to serve as a guest lecturer.
- Work with teaching hospitals to develop a home care rotation.
- Encourage the establishment of a home care residency program to help new physicians learn more about and gain a greater appreciation for the role of home care providers.
- Members of the clergy can also be vital referral sources. Host a clergy day during which you invite members of the clergy to your offices to learn about home care and the services you provide.

GARNER SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS

One of NHM’s objectives is to educate public officials about the home care community’s compassion and dedication to quality care. Officials need your feedback as they look for ways to develop new systems that will address the growing needs of their constituents.

The Official Proclamation/Resolution

The official proclamation/resolution is a useful tool for attracting public attention to your NHM activities. Ask your state and city officials to designate November as NHM.

In many cases you should be able to obtain official recognition directly from a public official through a proclamation. A sample proclamation is provided in the media resources section of this website. However, if the official must seek approval from an entire legislative or executive body before declaring November as NHM, then a resolution is required. Because this can be a lengthy process, it is important to get an early start on these activities.

Step 1: Contacting the Official(s)

When contacting an elected official, speak with the staff person who handles special events. If a resolution is required, target the official who is most supportive of home care issues and ask him or her to introduce your resolution before the entire body.

Provide your contact with an explanation of the purpose of NHM and how a proclamation/resolution would aid in promoting its celebration. In most cases you will be instructed to email or mail a written request.

Step 2: Submitting Your Request

Send a written request on your company’s letterhead with a sample proclamation/resolution attached. Provide background material about NHM and your organization, highlighting the importance of home care in your community. Specify the date by which you need to receive the proclamation or resolution. If you are interested in having the leader present the proclamation/resolution at a formal ceremony, provide details of the event. Shortly after sending in your request, contact the person you are working with in the official’s office to confirm that he or she received the information.

Step 3: Showing Your Appreciation

When you receive a proclamation or resolution, send a thank-you letter or email that expresses your gratitude and encourages the leader(s) to participate in your NHM activities.

Step 4: Contacting the Media

To maximize awareness of NHM, inform the media of the official recognition you receive. If the proclamation or resolution is signed in public, make certain that you contact the media and arrange to have a photographer or video person present.

Additional suggestions for reaching your public officials and enlisting their support during NHM include the following:

- Share positive information about your organization, including awards and recognition, with legislators and their staffs.
- Host an annual legislative breakfast to hear legislators' concerns and to have the opportunity to voice your perspectives on home care issues.
- Sponsor a NHM luncheon or banquet honoring national, state, and city legislators who have actively supported home care initiatives.
- Volunteer to work on the campaigns or serve on the health advisory committees of your most supportive legislators or promising candidates.
- Contribute to the campaigns of home care's greatest advocates. If possible, offer to host fundraisers.
- Mobilize a coalition of groups in your community that share your home care views and concerns. Meet regularly to develop strategies for lobbying your local legislators.

HONOR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The NHM celebration also serves as an opportunity to honor and assist the people who need your organization's support and appreciation most—patients and their families.

Here are ways to show them you care:

- Create a “partnership quilt” (fabric or paper) throughout the entire month, inviting patients, family members, and staff to design and contribute their own personal squares. Arrange to have all of the patches woven or glued together by the end of the month and featured in a prominent place.
- Develop NHM “fun sheets” (for example, crossword puzzles, coloring pages, and story games) that staff can give to children during home visits.
- Honor one of your agency's most outstanding informal caregivers with a “Caregiver of the Year” award.
- Host arts and crafts activities for home care patients.
- Coordinate a “caregiver's night out,” during which agency staff and volunteers sit with patients while caregivers get together for an evening away from home.
- Cater a special meal for your patients, incorporating their favorite foods.
- Ask employees, volunteers, or the local Humane Society to participate in a share-a-pet day. Request that carefully screened pets be brought to patients' homes for companionship.
- Organize a Hanukkah party, Christmas tree tour, or other holiday celebration for patients and their friends and families.
- Host a caregiver talent show to highlight the hidden talents of family caregivers. Invite staff and volunteers to participate as well.