

# Evolution of Infection Prevention and Control Policies and Processes in U.S. Home Health Care Agencies



Tenzin Trinley, MPH<sup>1</sup>; Ashley M. Chastain, DrPH, MPH<sup>1</sup>; Monika Pogorzelska-Maziarz, PhD, MPH, CIC, FAPIC<sup>2</sup>; Suning Zhao, MPH<sup>1</sup>; Patricia W. Stone, PhD, RN, FAAN, FAPIC<sup>1</sup>; Jingjing Shang, PhD, RN, FAAN, OCN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Health Policy, Columbia University School of Nursing, New York, NY 10032; <sup>2</sup> College of Nursing, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA 19107

## Background

- Prior to COVID-19, infection prevention and control (IPC) programs in home healthcare (HHC) agencies were suboptimal.
- Their IPC capacity was insufficient, leaving them underprepared for the pandemic.

## Objective

To describe the evolution of HHC agencies' IPC policies and processes, especially in response to COVID-19.

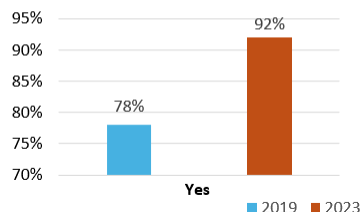
## Study Design

- We conducted national surveys of Medicare-certified HHC agencies in 2019 and 2023 to examine agency IPC policies and processes.
- 1,506 and 1,501 U.S. HHC agencies (including Puerto Rico) were included in the 2019 and 2023 samples, respectively.
- We stratified by key characteristics for national representativeness and oversampled rural agencies.
- Agency administrators or clinical managers were asked to complete the survey online or on paper.
- Questions covered topics like: IPC staffing, IPC compliance and training, current IPC policies/processes, and IPC challenges.
- Descriptive statistics comparing 2019 and 2023 weighted responses (allowing for national representativeness) were calculated using Stata 17.

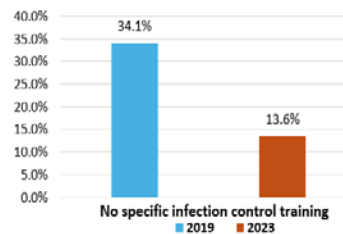
## Results

- We achieved a response rate of **35.6%** for the 2019 survey and **30.5%** in 2023.
- In 2023, **76% of respondents completed the survey online** (compared to 56% in 2019), while 24% opted for the paper version (compared to 44% in 2019), possibly due to greater technology comfortability.

Is there a committee at the agency that reviews infection control-related activities or issues?

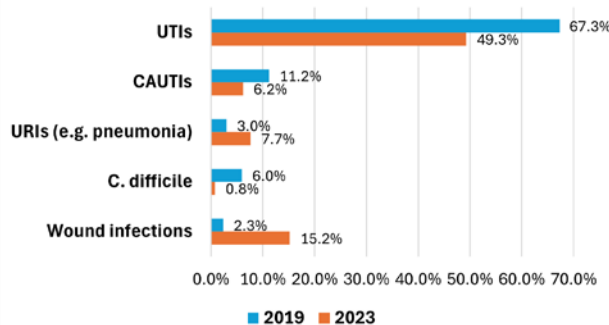


What specific infection control training/certification has this person received? (Mark all that apply)



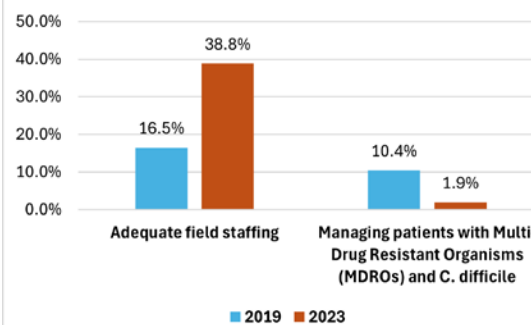
- In 2023, more agencies reported **having specific committees or dedicated staff** to review IPC activities. There was also an **increase in HHC IP personnel who had received specific IPC training** in 2023.

Which infection/organism is the greatest infection control challenge for the agency at this time? (Select only one response)



- While fewer number of HHC agencies reported UTI, CAUTI, and C. diff as the primary infection control challenge, the number of agencies reporting **upper respiratory infections (e.g., pneumonia) and wound infections as challenges increased in 2023.**

Which aspect of infection control is most challenging for the agency at this time? (Select only one response)



- In 2023, more HHC agencies reported that **ensuring adequate field staffing** was the most challenging aspect of IPC, compared to 2019.
- Fewer agencies reported challenges with MDROs and C. diff in 2023.

## Discussion

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of hand hygiene, bag technique, donning and doffing procedures and proper surface sanitizing methods.
- There appeared to be increased emphasis on infection prevention & control committees and training at agencies nationwide.
- Agencies faced staffing shortages, which can be addressed through cross-training, and flexible scheduling.
- Managing respiratory and wound infections requires innovative approaches such as telehealth, remote monitoring and enhanced coordination with specialized providers.

## Conclusion

- Since COVID-19, HHC agencies have updated their IPC policies/processes, with increased focus on specialized IPC training for their staff.
- Challenges related to field staffing continue to persist with respect to recruitment and retention.<sup>1</sup>

## Reference

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (n.d.). *COVID-19 intensifies home care workforce challenges*. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/covid-19-intensifies-home-care-workforce-challenges>

## Disclosures

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Contact Information:  
Tenzin Trinley, MPH  
Project Coordinator  
Center for Health Policy, CUSON

