

Gov. Evers: Announces 70 Wisconsin National Guard members complete CNA training course, provide support hospital and nursing home capacity

Posted on Thursday, Feb 3, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced approximately 70 Wisconsin National Guard members completed a two-week certified nursing assistant (CNA) training course at Madison College last week and are now assigned at healthcare facilities across Wisconsin. This effort, [announced in January](#), is part of a collaboration among the Evers Administration, Wisconsin National Guard, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to bring needed staffing support to Wisconsin's hospitals and nursing homes.

"The Wisconsin National Guard has been an invaluable part of our efforts throughout the pandemic, and this mission is no different," said Gov. Evers. "Members of the Guard are volunteering to step up so we can welcome more CNAs into our nursing homes across the state and expand capacity at our hospitals during this critical time. We are incredibly grateful for their dedication and sacrifice in service to their communities and our entire state."

The troops are assisting the state in increasing capacity and adding bed space as both the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and staffing shortages at healthcare facilities plague the state. The troops that began work this week joined approximately 50 other troops that had been previously assigned at long-term care facilities across Wisconsin earlier this year.

Guard troops are currently assisting as CNAs at facilities in Mineral Point, Wisconsin Dells, La Crosse, New London, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Cornell, Woodville, Sturgeon

Bay, Suring, Antigo, Weyauwega, Kaukauna, Kenosha, Waunakee, Glendale, and Racine.

Sgt. Andrew Moen, normally a heavy equipment transport operator as a soldier and plumber as a civilian, recently completed the 75-hour training course at Madison College and is now working at a healthcare facility in Racine.

“It was a good opportunity to go out and help and support the state and our people,” he said.

Some of the troops that completed the CNA qualification at Madison College either already had some training in the field or were planning to go into the field, but many, like Moen, volunteered to assist in this time of need out of a sense of duty.

“I knew nothing about the healthcare industry,” he said. “I learned a lot about the vocabulary and the terms they used, how to speak to patients, be respectful, learning the daily ins and outs of what nurses have to do, and it’s a lot.”

Moen praised the instructors at Madison College for their professionalism.

“Madison College is awesome,” he said. “All the teachers that have come out – not only did we have to volunteer, but they also volunteered to teach and come share their knowledge, because we have a lot of questions, and they have the answers, so thumbs up to them.”

Madison College expects to begin training another wave of Wisconsin National Guard troops as certified nursing assistants in the coming weeks. These troops will bring needed staffing support to Wisconsin’s hospitals and nursing homes.

“We are honored to partner with the Department of Health Services and the National Guard to meet the acute need for nursing assistants across the State of Wisconsin,” said Dr. Lisa Greenwood, Madison College’s associate dean of nursing. “We look forward to welcoming the second wave of National Guard member students to Madison College for Emergency Nurse Aide training. It is a great pleasure to work with the National Guard member students, who are eager to learn, dedicated to their mission, and striving to provide high quality care in their future nurse aide roles.”

Healthcare systems have been grateful for the help. Officials at Bellin Hospital and Odd Fellow Home in Green Bay have used additional nursing assistant support from

the Guard to bolster staffing and open bed space.

Bellin received 10 trainees in Green Bay Jan. 17 who immediately began training at Bellin Hospital, Bellin College, and Odd Fellow Home. Their support will allow Bellin, in partnership with Odd Fellow, to provide care at the nursing home that frees up space at the main hospital. The CNAs at Odd Fellow will be supervised by Registered Nurses (RNs) from Bellin and will care for patients who are ready for discharge to nursing care but who previously may have remained at the hospital due to staffing limitations. Bellin College also has played a key role, helping to train the CNAs and prepare them for work at the nursing home.

“We have welcomed the National Guard with open arms, and they have quickly become part of the Odd Fellow team,” said Odd Fellow CEO Charlene Everett. “They are enthusiastic, eager to learn and already have proven to be a tremendous asset for our staff and the patients we serve. We look forward to continuing to work and grow with them throughout this deployment.”

The unique partnership has come at a critical time.

“This partnership showcases a true spirit of collaboration between the National Guard, Odd Fellow Home and Green Bay hospitals, which are working together to ensure we can continue to provide the very best in care for the patients we serve,” said Bellin Health President & CEO Chris Woleske. “Challenging times call for new, innovative solutions, and we are so grateful to these partners for working with us to implement this important initiative.”

Likewise, in La Crosse, the arrival of Guard troops has helped open additional beds and flex staffing.

“Having the National Guard members working with us has made a huge difference,” said Renee Groth, MSN, RN, nurse manager at Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse. “With their help, we’ve been able to maintain bed capacity for patients while also giving our nursing staff respite from some of the tasks they were doing in addition to their regular nursing care.”

Approximately 600 Wisconsin National Guard troops continue to assist the state in a variety of capacities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many remain engaged with community COVID-19 testing, where they helped the state administer more than 1.2 million tests. Approximately 65 other troops began Temporary Nursing

Assistant roles at four mental health facilities in December, while another group of Guard troops continue to assist at vaccine stockpile management sites at key locations around the state. Many of the troops who recently began CNA duties transitioned from these other roles into this mission, but approximately 100 additional troops reported for duty in January specifically for the CNA mission.

Their duties vary depending on where they are assigned, but they received training in how to provide activities of daily living like personal hygiene, hair care, oral care, skin care, bathing, helping with the restroom, and repositioning individuals who may be largely immobile, according to Capt. Jacob Howey, the officer-in-charge of the group of troops that recently completed training.

Many Guard troops who have been mobilized since the early days of the pandemic have taken on a number of different roles depending on the needs of the state at the time.

“Overall, the Wisconsin National Guard showed that we’re pretty much a Swiss Army knife when it comes to whatever or whenever the governor needs something,” said Sgt. 1st Class Brody Lavene. “We’ll work to figure it out.”

Lavene is a perfect example of that flexibility and adaptability. He’s done COVID testing, vaccine stockpile management, vaccinations, and is now part of the transition to TNAs and CNAs.

Traditionally, he’s a field artilleryman assigned to the 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery, but he’s found the pandemic response to be a rewarding experience since he first mobilized in April 2020, and he’s relished the opportunity to serve his community. He’s even run into some co-workers from his civilian job while interacting with the community in his Guard role.