



# Leading in Long-Term Care Quality:

Nevada Board of Examiners for  
Long Term Care Administrators

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**Margaret A. McConnell, RN, BSN, MA, RFA**

Chairperson, Administrator

Las Vegas, NV 89102

Phone: (702) 486-5445

Fax: (702) 486-5439

E-Mail: [beltca@beltca.nv.gov](mailto:beltca@beltca.nv.gov)

# Executive Summary

## Present, Past, Future

Our aging population started growing geometrically in 2009. That's when the first of the 76 million-member Baby Boom generation turned age 65. Their needs and, more immediately, the needs of their parents will demand increasing support from the long-term care system and a sustained need for quality of care. Crucial to that is the level of competence and commitment shown by the administrators who manage nursing homes, assisted living communities and residential care homes.

One of the nation's leaders of that mission for the past 40 years has been close to home for Nevadans: **the Nevada Board of Examiners for Long Term Care Administrators (BELTCA)**. **BELTCA's role is to ensure quality through administrator licensure**. BELTCA's mission is public protection, a role its Board members take very seriously. Specifically, the Board licenses nursing home and assisted living/residential care administrators based on education, training, knowledge, skills and abilities to perform associated tasks demonstrated in licensure examinations and continuing education activities every two years.

Almost every state has had a board of this type since the 1970s, the early years of Medicaid and Medicare. The seven-member BELTCA is a Board with a difference. Compared to most boards, it has:

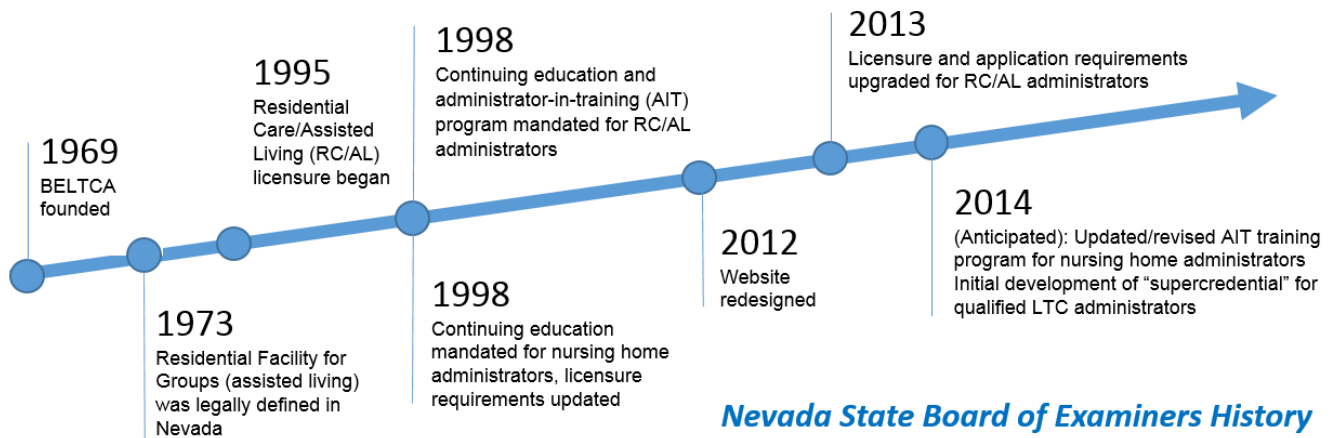
- **Broader scope:** Both nursing homes and assisted living (residential facilities for groups—RC/AL) administrators have been licensed in the state since 1995. More than half of states still do not license assisted living administrators.
- **Autonomy:** unlike boards funded by taxes under the auspices of state agencies, BELTCA is funded solely by licensure fees and retains its independence accordingly.
- **National recognition:** Board members have been a significant presence at the national level for years—particularly Margaret McConnell, Mary Ellen Wilkinson and Douglas Sinclair, who have served at various levels of the National Association of Long Term Care Administrator Boards (NAB) in pioneering upgraded standards for all the nation's LTC administrators.
- **Rigorous qualification standards:** Nevada requires nursing home administrators to have a bachelor's degree and at least 1,000 hours practice experience before

applying for a license, and 30 hours of continuing education to qualify for renewal every two years. RC/AL applicants are required to have two years of experience in residential care or some administrative experience over the previous six years when applying, plus 16 hours of continuing education every two years. New applicants for RC/AL licensure must now complete a 100-hour introductory course (including 60 hours on the NAB five Domains of Practice and 40 hours on Nevada Residential Care best practices, as well as complete 40 hours of administrator-in-training (AIT) preparation under a Board-approved mentor. The AIT program is now being refined for nursing home administrators as well. The Board also conducts investigations and imposes disciplinary actions based on quality of care complaints from the public and legal/governmental sources.

- **An increasingly sophisticated web site:** With a goal of offering paperless online licensure, training programs and webinars, BELTCA’s web site continues to upgrade.

And, along with all this, BELTCA members are working with NAB to develop a futuristic take on long-term care administrator licensure (on which, more later). All of these achievements have grown from years of teamwork among Board members at both the state and national levels. This paper chronicles perspectives on BELTCA from Board members and other key operatives.

## A Legacy of Leadership



*Nevada State Board of Examiners History*

## Broad Scope

Nevada had been licensing nursing home administrators for more than 20 years when it became apparent, in 1993, that a new type of senior care facility was growing rapidly: RC/AL. The number of “group care” homes was in the process of burgeoning from some 30 facilities to today’s more than 300. Spearheaded by then owner-operator Margaret McConnell, the Board adopted in 1995 a set of administrator licensure requirements for assisted living facilities (then known as “residential care homes”—“assisted living” got its own official state definition in 2003)—making Nevada one of the first states in the nation to adopt such licensure for this fast-growing field. Today, when many states continue to grapple with serious quality issues for assisted living, Nevada requires its assisted living administrators to meet rigorous educational and experiential standards.

“Margaret McConnell’s leadership and drive changed the complexion of the Board and the level of professionalism,” says vice-chair Mary Ellen Wilkinson, “and next to her was Douglas Sinclair, representing the smaller facilities. Doug is highly intelligent, a straight-shooter and absolute ballast in reality.”

According to Mary Liveratti, a former Board member and head for the state Department of Aging and Disabilities Services Division, “In the early days we had some small residential care operators moving in, delivering marginal care, closing overnight and moving elsewhere.



The Board moved to level the playing field for the high-quality performers by developing standards common to all providers, making it fair for everyone and extending complete protection to the public.”

Moreover, to limit so-called administrative “paperhangers”—administrators who hang their license certificates on the walls of multiple facilities but rarely show up there—the Board limited the number of residential care homes that can be run simultaneously to five.

What is behind BELTCA’s innovative spirit? Viewing it from a national perspective, Randy Lindner, NAB president and CEO and collaborator with McConnell and Sinclair on several national initiatives, says, “Nevada’s board is autonomous, rather than the more typical board that is run by an umbrella state agency overseeing a number of boards. Autonomous boards tend to be more progressive and passionate about their field, while the umbrella agency boards tend to be under-sourced by staff members who don’t understand the profession and are more task-oriented than public protection mission-driven.”

# Nationally Recognized

BELTCA Chairperson Margaret McConnell served as the first Residential Care/Assisted Living Administrator to chair NAB. Margaret also served as the first Chair of the RC/AL Examination Committee of the NAB. In addition she has served as NAB's Executive Committee Treasure and Chair of NAB's Marketing and Public Relations Committee. Serving in these national leadership positions has allowed Margaret to travel throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico representing the long-term care profession both for NAB and for Nevada. Douglas Sinclair has represented small residential care facilities at the national level for more than 15 years and has been a member of the RC/AL Exam Committee, assisting with item writing and overall ongoing development of this examination. BELTCA Vice-Chair Mary Ellen Wilkinson is the current Co-Chair of the National Continuing Education Services Committee for the NAB and has served on that committee for 10 years. All three have taken a lead role in expanding and upgrading administrator qualifications nationwide and are preparing to embark on a major new definition of that role (see "Website and the Future" below, and sidebar "The Future is Now"). "Our presence at the national level has been huge," says McConnell.

Charles Perry, former long-time president of the Nevada Health Care Association (NHCA), says, "It's possible they're better known at the national level than at the state level." Perhaps explaining



*They've continued to raise the bar for what the states are doing.*

*-Randy Lindner, NAB*

this phenomenon is that BELTCA Board members consistently approach their Board responsibilities in a low-key fashion, working hard in their positions without asking for or expecting public recognition.

But the Board's statewide reputation is good among providers, says Perry successor as NHCA president Daniel Mathis, himself a skilled nursing facility administrator for 25 years. The Board is appreciated among his members for taking a fair and supportive stance in maintaining high licensure standards for the state, he says.

Says NAB's Randy Lindner, "They've continued to raise the bar for what the states are doing. They've done a great job—they understand and support our mission and they're passionate about protecting the public."

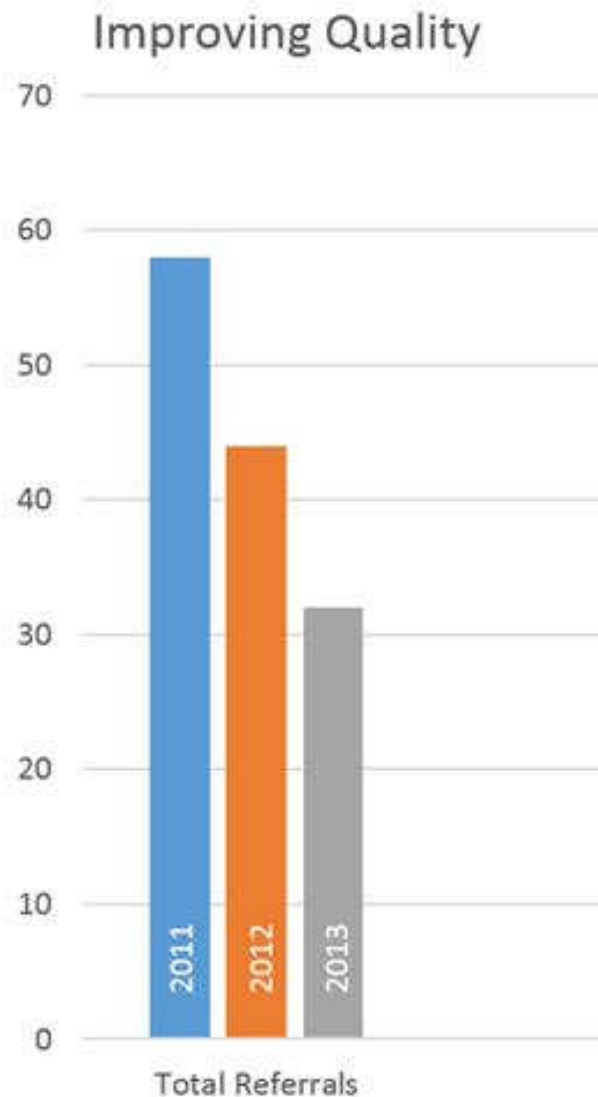
# Rigorous Standards

Before BELTCA got involved with RC/AL in the mid-1990s, various problems in that field were arising in the state. Says Douglas Sinclair, who has represented small assisted living operators on the Board since 1995, “Some operators were actually buying residents through deals made with various referral sources but then were delivering inadequate care. After the state Board of Health ruled against referral agencies accepting those fees, BELTCA adopted a regulation forbidding administrators from paying them. Because of this, Nevada residents now have a better chance of being placed in the right facility at the right time.

“We have also applied strong disciplinary actions,” adds Sinclair, “sufficient to put bad operators out of business. Poor performance varies: the smaller facilities can have ‘paperhangers’ who don’t manage them adequately, while the larger facilities, though they often have corporate resources behind them, can still have repeat deficiencies. The Board’s stance has been that a first-time deficiency can be worked on, but a repeat deficiency indicates that no corrective action has been undertaken. We don’t accept that.”

“The disciplinary role is not a pleasant one,” says Mary Ellen Wilkinson, “but it’s necessary. When we first developed assisted living licensure in the mid-90s, we were getting some 30 disciplinary cases referred to us a month, probably because we were the first state doing this. We’ve since developed a good working relationship with the state’s Attorney General so that we can dispose of most cases before they even come to the Board just by giving

them a second chance. About a fourth of cases make it to the Board because they’re on probationary status or have had a second offense. When that happens, we’ve been able to weed out the worst of the worst.”



*A sharp decline in actionable disciplinary cases coincides with BELTCA’s introduction of upgraded licensure standards.*



Says Margaret McConnell, “We emphasize a supportive role initially, rather than a punitive one. We want to help administrators improve their use of best practices.” NHCA’s Daniel Mathis says, “They don’t take disciplinary measures unless they’re really deserved, but they will levy a fine as high as \$10,000 and suspend licenses if poor performance doesn’t improve. They talk the talk and they walk the walk.”

Adds Charles Perry, “It’s been very helpful that one Board member has a lengthy background in law enforcement and investigations and is skilled at developing evidence.” The Board in general strives for a professional approach after receiving complaints from the Nevada state Bureau of Licensure, the state long-term care ombudsman, or legal and civilian sources. The incidence of Board referrals and disciplinary actions dropped significantly as of 2013, with referrals down from 42 to 33 since 2011, and disciplinary actions down from 25 to 19 over that same time period—a decline in actionable cases of 25% (see sidebar “Disciplinary Impact”). Commenting on this, Board executive director Sandy Lampert notes that most of the worst offenders have been older, less adequately trained administrators who have been “grandfathered” in from their pre-1995 status. This indicates, she suggests, that BELTCA’s upgraded standards are having an impact on administrator performance.

“We want to help administrators improve their use of best practices.”

Margaret McConnell

## Self-Funded

Because the seven-member volunteer Board, which meets quarterly, is funded solely by licensing fees, the resulting independence is a critical factor in allowing committed, experienced Board members to “spread their wings” in developing new and effective approaches to long-term care administrator licensure. “Consistent teamwork by experienced and committed Board members is what has put Nevada ahead of the pack,” says Wendy Simons, former Board member, former Chief of the Nevada Health Care and Quality Compliance agency and former owner/operator of a large and prominent assisted living community in Reno. She adds, “Continuity is a major factor in the successful management of any business enterprise, and BELTCA is no exception.”

“The concern,” notes Mary Ellen Wilkinson, “is that large-scale disruption of this continuity could set the Board back functionally, with years of experience and innovative thinking lost. Board members are willing to devote the time and effort needed to gain the attention and support of national organizations that recognize them and finance for their involvement in high-level activities and initiatives. I suspect that many owner-operators would want no part of Board membership if they knew of the time and effort involved in establishing national connections that work for the state.”

## What's Next

BELTCA continues to ride the crest of the new wave of developments for future long-term care administrator licensure. According to Sandy Lampert, for example, every effort is being made to make licensure application and renewal a paperless, seamless process online. Training programs, including distance learning, will become available, enabling administrators to remain up-to-date in their skill sets without ever having to leave home or office for expensive travel. The totally online experience is a goal Lampert hopes to achieve within two years.

But the futurescape for Nevada long-term care licensure goes beyond that. Today's cutting-edge trend in long-term care is the merging and aligning of multiple levels of aging services within a single organization, sometimes under a single individual. Skilled nursing and assisted living, particularly, are coming together, and home health care, hospice, adult day care—even wellness programming—are gradually seeing their silos fall as the smoothness, efficiency and convenience of integrating aging-related services becomes apparent. This may well mean that the administrator of the future will have skills in some or all of these areas and be able to function managing any one or all of them.

In keeping with this trend, and perhaps a little ahead of it, NAB and Nevada BELTCA members are working to develop standards, testing items and general requirements for current and emerging service lines, as well as an administrator "supercredential" (see sidebar "The Future is Now"). NAB's Randy Lindner notes that a recent study the organization conducted indicated that

## The Future is Now

The past 10 years have seen a rapid expansion of the concept of long-term care (LTC). No longer simply a matter of nursing home or assisted living facility-based care, LTC now reaches into the community and even into the private home, where clinical and supportive services are provided for both short- and long-term needs. Adult day care, community centers, home healthcare: new systems are developing that embrace all these service lines under one organizational umbrella. While each of these services requires its own expertise, demand is growing for professionals able to successfully manage all of them.

"Supercredential" initiatives at both the state and national levels aim to prepare this new generation of leaders—and protect the growing population whose care they will oversee. Joining the National Association of Long Term Care Administrator Boards (NAB) in this project and playing a key leadership are BELTCA members. Steps toward developing the supercredential will include outreach to national credentialing boards, provider associations and their state affiliates—Margaret McConnell's anticipated leadership role—and restructuring of the NAB Test Item Bank to reflect the appropriate knowledge base, an NAB function that BELTCA member Douglas Sinclair has performed for the past 15 years.

Thus, just as the state has led in the credentialing of assisted living, so will Nevada play a key role in developing the New Long-Term Care.



long-term care administrators have a more than 80% shared knowledge base among all these service levels. “They are leaders and managers, after all, not specialized practitioners, and they all need similar skills in managing finance, human resources and top-level decision making. We plan now to restructure our test item bank to offer common core knowledge items as part of the examination and work with national associations to explore the standards and qualifications that can be seen as common. Several states, with Nevada among the leaders, are already restructuring their licensing operations to begin to accommodate this.”

Mary Ellen Wilkinson says, “Building the continuum of care is one of our main missions, a key element of Governor Brian Sandoval’s tenet that all citizens should have access to quality healthcare. It’s important to make providers of the other levels of

care as accountable as nursing home and assisted living facilities are, and BELTCA stands ready to achieve this, at no cost to the state. We already, in Nevada, have 30 or so administrators licensed in both skilled nursing and assisted living, and some have home health and other community-based care responsibilities as well. These administrators are already doing it, and their numbers may increase faster than we think.”

McConnell sums up, “We’re working with NAB, the American Health Care Association, LeadingAge, the American College of Health Care Administrators and their state affiliates to make this level of licensure possible. This is the future, and we have to be a part of it and help shape it.”