alwAyS Journal

Issue 2026-4 | Winter 2026-2027

AHORA Y SIEMPRE

A LETTER FROM AHORA Y SIEMPRE

Welcome

Dear families, friends, and team,

Happy Holidays! ¡Felices Fiestas!

A new year always feels like a fresh page, and this one starts with good news. On January 1, our Dallas Corporate Headquarters opens at its new home, 1700 Pacific Avenue, Suite 3640. Whether you visit us in Dallas, Del Rio, Laredo, or any of our nine locations, you'll find the same open door and the same warm welcome.

Some things change, but our mission doesn't. Every day, our team shows up for the people we serve with patience, respect, and love. Scan the code on page 4 to join our mailing list and never miss an update.

Thank you for trusting us with what matters most. Here's to a year full of hope and joy!

Now and alwAyS,

Francisco Gonzalez

Founder, Ahora y Siempre

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POP-CULTURE THEME

New Year, Same Mission!






Photos from through the years

PROGRAM NEWS

Program News for 2027

General information.

1. Behavior support training: grace period ends December 31, 2026.

The required web-based Behavioral Support Services Provider Policy Training was not available on the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) website. HHSC set a temporary "hold harmless" period from August 1 through December 31, 2026, for Home and Community-based Services (HCS) providers and Texas Home Living (TxHmL) providers. Starting in 2027, families can expect behavior support providers to complete the revised training once HHSC publishes it.

2. New Texas Home Living openings through April 2027.

On August 28, 2026, HHSC posted revised Texas Home Living (TxHmL) slot releases for August 2026 through April 2027. If your family is on the interest list, contact your Local Intellectual and Developmental Disability Authority (LIDDA) to ask about your place on the list.

3. Medicare and Medicaid changes starting January 1, 2027.

On January 1, 2027, more STAR+PLUS health plans in Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, and Hidalgo counties begin operating Integrated Dual Special Needs Plans. People who have both Medicare and Medicaid may move to a different plan. This mainly changes billing and Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) records for providers. If your loved one has both Medicare and Medicaid and gets a letter about a plan change, share it with your service coordinator and with us.

KEEP FOR REFERENCE

Critical Incidents: What Gets Reported, and When

In Home and Community-based Services (HCS) and Texas Home Living (TxHmL), some events must be reported to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). HHSC uses these reports to spot patterns and keep people safe, and Ahora y Siempre reviews them to help stop problems from happening again. *General information for families and caregivers, not legal advice.*

What counts as a critical incident

- **Calls to 911** made by staff (medical, behavioral or psychiatric, or both)
- **Emergency room visits and hospital admissions** (medical, behavioral or psychiatric, or both). Planned hospital stays and urgent care visits for minor illnesses such as a cold or the flu are not reported.
- **Restraints**, by type: physical, mechanical or chemical
- **Allegations of abuse, neglect or exploitation**, and any that are later confirmed
- **Unauthorized departures:** a person's whereabouts are unknown and they are in danger of serious injury or death
- **Arrests** of a person by police
- **Deaths**, including unusual deaths (unknown cause, or a death during or after an unusual incident)

Who reports, and how

Ahora y Siempre enters critical incidents into HHSC's online Critical Incident Management System (CIMS). Staff, families and caregivers should tell their supervisor or the Ahora y Siempre office right away when any of these events happens, so nothing is missed.

Deadlines

- **Monthly critical incident report:** entered no later than the last day of the month after the month the incident happened. For example, a January incident must be entered by February 28.
- **A death:** Ahora y Siempre reports it to HHSC and to the local intellectual and developmental disability authority by the end of the next business day. If the family may not know, Ahora y Siempre tells them as soon as possible, and within 24 hours.

Separate: abuse, neglect and exploitation

The monthly report does **not** replace an abuse report. Anyone who suspects abuse, neglect or exploitation must report it **right away, and within one hour**:

- **Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Provider Investigations, 24/7:** 1-800-647-7418, or online at TxAbuseHotline.org. You may also call the general Texas Abuse Hotline, 1-800-252-5400.
- In an emergency, **call 911 first.**

To file a complaint about services, call **HHSC Complaint and Incident Intake at 1-800-458-9858.**

Ahora y Siempre will never punish anyone for reporting in good faith.

TRAINING CORNER

Keeping Our Loved Ones Safe: Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation

alwAyS Journal, Issue 2026-4. General information, not legal advice.

Everyone who receives Home and Community-based Services (HCS) or Texas Home Living (TxHmL) deserves to feel safe, respected, and cared for. This training explains what abuse, neglect, and exploitation mean, what signs to watch for, and how to report.

What do these words mean?

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) rules define these terms when the person accused is a staff member or other direct provider:

- **Physical abuse** includes an act that caused or may have caused physical injury, any inappropriate or excessive force or physical punishment, and restraint or seclusion that does not follow state and federal rules. Rules also cover sexual abuse and verbal or emotional abuse.
- **Neglect** is a careless act or failure to act that caused, or put the person at risk of, physical or emotional harm or death. Examples include not following the person's plan, not giving enough food, clothing, or health care, or not keeping the home safe.
- **Exploitation** is using the person, or the person's money or belongings, for someone else's benefit or gain.

Quick Tips: Speak Up, Keep Them Safe

- **In danger now? Call 911 first.**
- **Report it:** Abuse Hotline (Department of Family and Protective Services Provider Investigations line, 24/7), 1-800-647-7418, or www.TxAbuseHotline.org. Relay Texas: 7-1-1.
- **No proof needed.** A reason to believe is enough. Investigators find the facts.
- **Write it down:** what you saw, when, where, and who was there. Do not clean up or move things that may be evidence.
- **You are protected.** Good-faith reports are protected by law, and providers may not retaliate.

Scan to watch the training video

Continued on page 5

FROM AHORA Y SIEMPRE

Agency updates

Ahora y Siempre (AyS) continues to be a 4-day work week agency.

Our locations

Dallas Headquarters
1700 Pacific Avenue, Ste 3640, Dallas, TX 75201

Del Rio Co-Headquarters
317 S. Main Street, Del Rio, TX 78840

Devine
198 County Road 6702, Devine, TX 78016

Fredericksburg
107 Industrial Loop, Fredericksburg, TX 78624

Kerrville
1404 Sidney Baker St, Ste 1402-1404, Kerrville, TX 78028

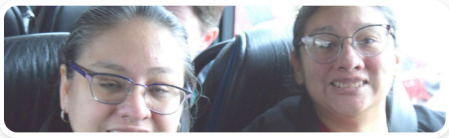
Laredo
2387 E. Saunders St, Ste 1, Laredo, TX 78041

Llano
115A W. Main St., Llano, TX 78643

New Braunfels
511 E. North Street, New Braunfels, TX 78130

Uvalde
128 W. Main Street, Ste C, Uvalde, TX 78801

Front desk for all locations: **214-741-6359**





Photos from through the years

BY THE NUMBERS

The direct support workforce

A 2026 national survey of providers — 524 organizations across all 50 states and the District of Columbia — found that staffing shortages are putting services under serious strain.

85% had moderate or severe staffing challenges in the past year

55% turned away new referrals because they did not have enough staff

36% saw more frequent reportable incidents because of shortages

29% discontinued programs or services

Direct support professionals make everyday care possible. Families and caregivers feel the difference when a team is fully staffed, and Ahora y Siempre is grateful for its team.

STAY IN TOUCH

Important contacts

Contacts

In danger now? Call 911 first.

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Provider Investigations, 24/7
1-800-647-7418

www.TxAbuseHotline.org

Also: Texas Abuse Hotline,
1-800-252-5400

Relay Texas
7-1-1

HHSC Complaint and Incident Intake
1-800-458-9858

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TRAINING CORNER

Keeping Our Loved Ones Safe, continued from page 3

Signs to watch for

- Bruises, burns, or injuries that no one can explain
- Weight loss, poor hygiene, missed medicines, or missed appointments
- Big changes in mood, sleep, or behavior
- Sudden fear of a certain person, or not wanting to go to a place
- Missing money, belongings, or unusual bank activity

How to report

If someone is in danger right now, call 911. To report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation, call the Abuse Hotline at **1-800-647-7418**, go to www.TxAbuseHotline.org, or use Relay Texas at 7-1-1. Texas law says anyone who has cause to believe a person with a disability, or a person receiving services from a provider, is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report it immediately. The same immediate-report rule applies to children.

What Ahora y Siempre staff must do

State rules require every staff member, service provider, and volunteer to be trained on recognizing and preventing abuse, neglect, and exploitation before starting work and every year after. Staff must report immediately, and no later than one hour after they know or suspect a problem. After a report, the provider must protect the person, arrange any needed medical or counseling care, and protect evidence. The provider must also tell families and caregivers, when services start and at least once a year, how to report and how to help protect their loved one.

THIS QUARTER

Important dates

JANUARY

- **Friday, January 1:** New Year's Day, offices closed
- **Tuesday, January 5:** service delivery logs due
- **Tuesday, January 12:** Advisory Committee meeting, Dallas (time and place to be announced)
- **Monday, January 18:** Martin Luther King Jr. Day, offices closed
- **Tuesday, January 19:** Advisory Committee meeting, Del Rio (time and place to be announced)
- **Tuesday, January 26:** Advisory Committee meeting, Laredo (time and place to be announced)
- **Friday, January 29:** fire drills due

FEBRUARY

- **Friday, February 5:** service delivery logs due
- **Monday, February 15:** Presidents Day, offices closed

MARCH

- **Friday, March 5:** service delivery logs due
- **March 24 - 26 (Wednesday to Friday):** Holy Week, offices closed
- **Monday, March 29:** Easter Monday, offices closed

FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Caregiver pay and taxes: Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Notice 2014-7

Under IRS Notice 2014-7, certain Medicaid waiver payments to **host home providers** in Home and Community-based Services (HCS) may be left out of the provider's federal taxable income. The notice applies **only to host home providers**, who care for a person living in the provider's own home.

All other providers and caregivers receive a Form 1099 or a Form W-2 and report that income as usual.

This is general information, not tax advice. Families and caregivers should confirm their own situation with a tax professional.

KEEP FOR REFERENCE

Know your rights / How to report

Know your rights: you are protected when you report

A person who reports in good faith is protected from civil and criminal liability. A provider of home and community-based services may not retaliate against anyone who reports or gives information in good faith. Failing to report when you know is a crime.

Speaking up is an act of love. If something does not feel right, please report it.

How to report

In danger now? Call 911 first.

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Provider Investigations, 24/7

1-800-647-7418

www.TxAbuseHotline.org

Relay Texas

7-1-1

Staff: report within one hour, then tell your supervisor. Do not investigate on your own.

FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS: KEEP FOR REFERENCE

How to share a concern

Step 1: Tell Ahora y Siempre first

Call the Ahora y Siempre program manager or program director at **214-741-6359**, or email **managers@myays.net**. You can share a concern by phone, in writing or in person, and you do not have to give your name.

Step 2: We look into it

We investigate and resolve your concern within 30 days. Then we tell you what we found, how we resolved it, and the state's phone number in case you are not satisfied.

Step 3: Not resolved? Contact the state

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Complaint and Incident Intake: **1-800-458-9858** (Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central), or ciicomplaints@hhs.texas.gov. You can also call the Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IDD) Ombudsman at **1-800-252-8154**.

Abuse, neglect or exploitation? Do not wait for us. Report it to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) immediately, no later than one hour: **1-800-647-7418** (24/7) or TxAbuseHotline.org. In an emergency, call 911.

No one will be punished for sharing a concern in good faith.

Check your understanding

1. **You notice a bruise no one can explain. Do you need proof before reporting?**
   Answer: No. A reason to believe (cause to believe) is enough. Investigators find the facts.
2. **How fast must HCS or TxHmL staff report suspected abuse?**
   Answer: Immediately, and no later than one hour after knowing or suspecting.
3. **A staff member borrows $40 from an individual's wallet "for gas" without paying it back. What type of concern is this?**
   Answer: Possible exploitation (using the person's resources for personal gain). Report it and let investigators decide.
4. **Can the agency punish a staff member for making a good-faith report?**
   Answer: No. Providers may not retaliate, and good-faith reporters are immune from liability.
5. **Staff forget to give a seizure medicine, but the person is not hurt. Can this still be neglect?**
   Answer: Yes. For HCS and TxHmL, neglect includes an act or omission that placed the person at risk of injury.