

# State Will Close Emily P. Bissell Hospital Permanently

State Will Close Emily P. Bissell Hospital Permanently, Citing Desires of Residents, Families and Staff and Declining Long-Term Care Census Statewide  
With Stakeholders, DHSS Will Begin Evaluating Alternative Uses

NEW CASTLE – Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Rita Landgraf has decided to close Emily P. Bissell Hospital near Wilmington permanently, citing a declining census across all of DHSS' long-term care facilities and the desire of the majority of Emily Bissell residents to remain where they are living now.

Because of ongoing problems with the nursing facility's hot water system, Secretary Landgraf decided in February to relocate the 48 residents at the time to other nursing homes to ensure their continued safety and well-being as repairs were made. By March, all of the residents were relocated to DHSS' Governor Bacon Health Center in Delaware City, the Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill in Smyrna, privately run nursing homes or placements in the community.

"In Delaware's history, Emily P. Bissell Hospital has had an important role in caring for our state's most vulnerable residents," Secretary Landgraf said. "I want to thank all of those DHSS employees who have cared for the residents of Emily Bissell over the years. But with more Delaware seniors wanting to live in their own homes as they age, now is the time to look at alternative uses for the campus' buildings."

Since the move of residents in March, Jill Rogers, director of the Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities, which oversees DHSS' three long-term care facilities, said residents and their families have been

regularly contacted to assist with any transition issues. In July, residents and family members were asked their feelings about returning to Emily Bissell. Only one-third said they wanted to return.

“Our priority was and continues to be the health, safety and well-being of the residents,” Jill Rogers said. “We are pleased that so many of the Emily Bissell residents and their families are happy with their new locations and satisfied with the care they are receiving.”

The 143 staff members who worked at Emily Bissell also have transitioned to other locations within DHSS, primarily Governor Bacon Health Center, Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill and Delaware Psychiatric Center. Secretary Landgraf said about half of the staff members with a preference indicated they want to remain where they are today. She said the closing of Emily Bissell will not result in any layoffs.

“I appreciate the resilience that our employees have shown in this transition,” Secretary Landgraf said. “Their priority is serving the public, and they continue to do that at their new work sites. I appreciate their dedication and commitment to the people.”

Reflecting the desire of many Delawareans to remain in their homes and connected to their communities as they age, Secretary Landgraf said the census at the three long-term care facilities has been in steady decline for years. In Fiscal Year 2009, the total census at the three nursing facilities was 354 residents. Today, it stands at 209, a decline of about 40 percent. Before the March relocation, Emily Bissell had 48 residents, or about 56 percent of its 85-bed licensed capacity.

“The declining census at our long-term care facilities illustrates the desire of so many Delawareans to age safely

and with dignity in their own homes,” Secretary Landgraf. “With an aging baby boomer population and the influx of seniors to Sussex County, we continue to build our capacity to provide services in the community. Closing Emily Bissell as a long-term care facility will help us to continue to shift necessary resources and services to the community. I am confident that this path forward will result in the highest quality of services for the people of Delaware.”

The 50-acre Emily Bissell campus on Newport Gap Pike includes the Bissell Hospital, administrative offices that supported the hospital, and Christiana Care’s Evergreen Center, which offers adult day care services. The Department of Health and Social Services will begin evaluating proposed alternative uses for the facility over the next several months. During that time, DHSS will use the facility’s administrative space to provide temporary offices space for other state employees. At the present time, no changes to Christiana Care’s Evergreen Center are contemplated.

“We know how important this facility and the open space surrounding it are to the community,” Secretary Landgraf said. “We look forward to talking to stakeholders about how we can best use the aging facility in a manner consistent with the character of the area.”

Emily P. Bissell Hospital, which was founded in the early 1900s, originally provided care to people diagnosed with tuberculosis. The nursing facility most recently provided skilled and intermediate care to residents.

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