

Q2

Ron DeSantis Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD State Surgeon General



A Medical Quality Assurance Publication

Florida Department of Health

Quarterly Performance Report

October 1 - December 31, 2024





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LICENSE



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I'm excited for MQA to continue the fiscal year by presenting another outstanding progress report. This report showcases the tenacity of MQA's workforce through demonstrable commitment to continued improvement and success in Florida's health care sector.

MQA continues to exemplify the pursuit of timely and effective customer service, marked by the achievement of 2 million conversations facilitated through ELI since the measuring of its volume in July 2022. ELI, an innovative chatbot, assists customers 24/7 through voice calls and web chats, providing helpful, actionable insights designed to enhance the user experience.

As we advance efforts to strengthen Florida's health care community through upcoming initiatives in digital infrastructure, expanded outreach programs, and ongoing work to expedite licensure, we are excited

to share the progress already underway. With your continued support and dedication to our mission, we remain committed to protecting, promoting, and improving the health of all people in Florida.



Statuthad

Jennifer L. Wenhold, MSW, CPM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<u>Section 456.025(9)</u>, Florida Statutes, requires MQA to report quarterly on its performance and financial status and assess its effectiveness in regulating health care professions and practitioners.

LICENSING

- 1,563,592 Florida licensed practitioners were recorded at the close of Quarter Two.
- 32,388 initial applications were received while 25,252 initial applications were issued.
- 811 applications were issued through Office of Veteran Licensure Services (OVLS).
- 131,416 renewal applications were processed, a 25.8% increase from last quarter, with 90.4% processed online.
- Initial applications were processed in an average of 3.5 days, while renewals were processed in 0.7 days this quarter.

CUSTOMER CONTACT

- 49,270 Web Chats and 154,849 Voice Calls were conducted through ELI.
- 59,608 calls were offered through the MQA Contact Call Center with 88% answered.

ENFORCEMENT

- 170 new Massage, Optical, Dental, and Electrolysis (M.O.D.E.) inspections were completed in 5.1 days on average.
- 28 new pharmacy inspections were completed in 7.4 days on average.
- 1,798 investigations were completed, a 26.6% increase from last quarter. 7,170 complaints were received, a 37.3% decrease from last quarter.
- 262 unlicensed activity complaints were received, and 123 unlicensed activity cease and desist orders were issued.

FINANCES

 MQA maintained an overall cash balance of over \$30 million at the close of Quarter Two.

AROUND MQA

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Guided by the core values of innovation, collaboration, accountability, responsiveness, and excellence, this section highlights some of MQA's quarterly accomplishments by dedicated teams who tirelessly contribute to public protection and regulatory efficiency in Florida.



We search for creative solutions and manage resources wisely.

ELI Reaches 2 Million Conversations for Real-Time Support

In December 2024, ELI surpassed 2 million conversations since the measuring of its volume in July 2022. This marks a significant milestone in MQA's ongoing commitment to innovation and seeking new ways to best meet its customer's needs.

ELI is MQA's chatbot that interprets users' questions and provides helpful, actionable recommendations by using data-driven insights and simplified processes. This virtual agent is available anytime, day or night, to help customers with their questions in real-time, whether through web chats or voice calls.



We use teamwork to achieve common goals and solve problems.

Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Helps Expedite Multistate Medical Licensure

The Boards of Medicine and Osteopathic Medicine, in collaboration with several MQA units, the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Commission (IMLCC), and other Compact member states, implemented the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (IMLC).

This agreement, which allows states to work together to expedite the licensure process for physicians who want to practice in multiple states which provides patients quicker access to health care practitioners.

Florida went live with the IMLC on Dec. 20, 2024, and began processing applications for the State of Principal Licensure designations and IMLC expedited licenses on Dec. 27, 2024.

OACCOUNTABILITY

We perform with integrity.

Association of Social Work Boards Annual Delegates Meeting Held in November

Several MQA employees attended the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Annual Meeting of the Delegates on Nov. 7-9, 2024.

This meeting covered operations, elected leadership, discussed current challenges and emerging trends in social work regulation. They also facilitated collaboration between state regulators and educational programs. The board chair, as a member of the rules committee, led a charter to



facilitate more collaboration amongst states, which was voted on and passed unanimously.

This reflects MQA's ongoing dedication to staying current with changes and trends in health care to effectively address emerging needs of customers and health care consumers, while demonstrating a strong commitment to accountability in practice.

<u>ORESPONSIVENESS</u>

We achieve our mission by serving our customers and engaging our partners.

Operation Skin So Soft

In early November, MQA's Bureau of Enforcement (BOE) collaborated with the Polk County Sheriff's Office Vice Unit during a two-day undercover operation called "Operation Skin So Soft," which resulted in the arrest of 21 individuals in which both licensed and unlicensed practitioners were operating outside of lawful and safe conduct.

One of MQA's missions is to address and respond to unlicensed activity (ULA) and practitioners that endanger the public. To accomplish that, the BOE — comprised of Consumer Services Unit (CSU), Compliance Management Unit (CMU), Investigative Services Unit (ISU) and Prosecution Services Unit (PSU) — worked together and with different levels of law enforcement to ensure the safety and well-being of Florida's health care consumers.

These units work together to receive, investigate, and resolve complaints against health care practitioners and facility owners.

OEXCELLENCE

We promote quality outcomes through learning and continuous performance improvement.

Paychecks for Patriots Hiring Fair

In November, MQA's Office of Veteran Licensure Services (OVLS) and the Customer Contact Center attended the Paychecks for Patriots Hiring Fair, hosted by CareerSource Capital Region.

MQA staff engaged with veterans who may be interested in a career with the Department of Health (Department) or as a health care practitioner. OVLS' participation in the hiring fair aligns with its goals of collaborating with external organizations to extend its veteran outreach.

OVLS was established in 2023 to support veterans, active-duty service members and their spouses by offering military fee waivers and expedited licensure processes. These efforts aim to alleviate financial burdens and simplify transactions for military families facing relocation and civilian reentry.



PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

Required under section 456.005, Florida Statutes, quarterly performance reports (QPRs) provide the Division of Medical Quality Assurance (MQA), decision-makers, consumers, and other stakeholders with quarterly snapshots of key performance statistics, such as licensure, enforcement, and financial information.

This is a quarterly report of the performance of MQA as measured by the following key statistics: initial licensure, license renewals, military data, customer contact, enforcement, and financial data.

INITIAL APPLICATIONS

In Quarter Two, MQA received 32,388 initial applications from prospective practitioners seeking licensure. Of these, 25,252 initial applications were issued for a total of 1,563,592 licensed practitioners in Florida. MQA processed initial applications for qualified applicants within 3.5 days on average. An increase in initial application processing time may be seen due to the availability of new pathways offered through the implementation of new legislation passed during the 2024 legislative session. The profession with the most applications processed was Nursing at 53.9% (19,793) of the total applications processed.

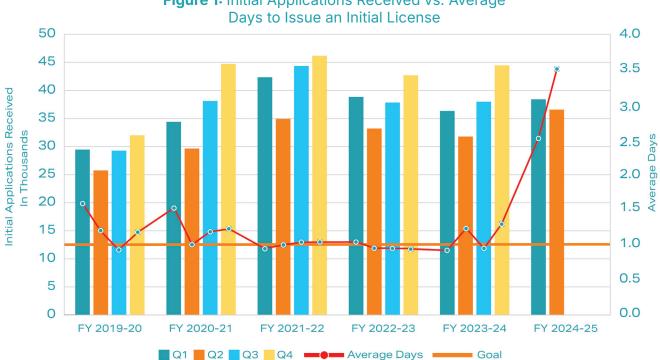


Measure: The average time taken to issue an initial license to a qualified applicant.



Definition: The average duration from when an application is deemed qualified to the issuance of the license.







DID YOU KNOW?

The licensure process can be delayed by several factors, mainly stemming from the wait for crucial documents from applicants. These include background screening results, records of criminal and disciplinary history, license verifications, transcripts, and continuing education certificates. Exam results can also cause delays, as some professions permit applicants up to one year to complete exams. Seasonal trends also affect processing times; the busiest periods for applications, typically due to graduation seasons, occur during the fall and spring semesters, while renewal peaks occur in even-numbered years.

MILITARY DATA

The Office of Veteran Licensure Services (OVLS), established in 2023, is dedicated to providing specialized support for military service members, veterans, and military spouses seeking licensure as a Florida practitioner.

There have been 20,285 military initial applications issued since the first military license was approved. 811 applications were issued this quarter.

Military Application Type	Overall Total	Overall %	Issued FY 2024-25 Q2
Type 1: Military Fee Waiver	16,876	88.2%	726
Type 2: VALOR (Veterans Application for Licensure Online Response System)	3,026	14.9%	53
Type 3: Military Spouse	376	1.9%	32
Type 4: Military Platform	7	0.03%	0
Total	20,285		811



LICENSE RENEWALS

MQA processed 131,416 renewal applications in Quarter Two, which is a 25.8% increase from last quarter, and processed completed applications for qualified applicants in less than one day (0.7) on average. The majority of renewal applications were processed online (90.4%).



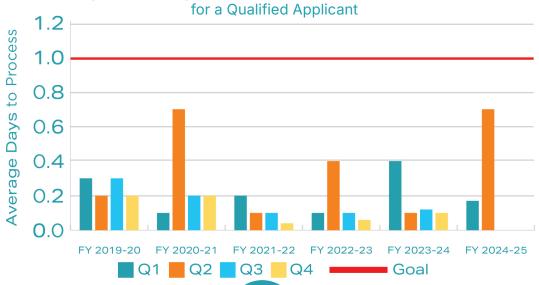
Measure: The average number of days to process a renewal application for a qualified applicant.



Definition: The average number of days to renew a license for health care practitioners and facilities from receipt of the completed application through approval.









DID YOU KNOW?

Health care practitioners renew their licenses in either even or odd years, depending on their profession:

Even-Year Renewals:

- Radiologic Technicians: Renew based on their birth month.
- Physician Assistants and certain physician groups: Renew by January 31.
- Acupuncture: Renew by February 28.
- Dental Practitioners, including Dental Hygienists and Nuclear Pharmacists: Renew by February 28.
- Osteopathy, Podiatry, and Chiropractic Medicine: Renew by March 31.
- Nurses (Registered Nurse and Advanced Practitioner
 Registered Nurse): Renew by April 30 or July 31.
- Psychology, Electrologist, Electrologist Facility, and a group of Certified Nursing Assistants: Renew by May 31.
- Clinical Laboratories: Renew by August 31.
- Athletic Trainers and Nursing Home Administrators: Renew by September 30.
- Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics: Renew by December 1.
- Opticians, Consultant Pharmacists, and Pharmacy Technicians: Renew by December 31.

Odd-Year Renewals:

- Radiologic Technicians: Renew based on their birth
 month
- Medical Physicists and another group of Medical Doctors: Renew by January 31.
- Occupational Therapists, Optometrists, Pharmacy Establishments, and Hearing Aid Specialists: Renew by February 28.
- Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Mental Health Counselors: Renew by March 31.
- Nurses (Group 3): Renew by April 30.
- Respiratory Therapists, another group of Certified Nursing Assistants, and Dietitians and Nutritionists: Renew by May 31.
- Licensed Practical Nurses: Renew by July 31.
- Massage Therapists and Massage Establishments: Renew by August 31.
- Pharmacists: Renew by September 30.
- Physical Therapists, School Psychologists, and Orthotists and Prosthetists: Renew by November 30.
- Midwifery, Genetic Counselors, and Speech-Language
 Pathologists and Audiologists: Renew by December 31.

CUSTOMER CONTACT

Health care consumers and practitioners can contact MQA through ELI and the call center for prompt answers to their questions. ELI, the Department's virtual agent, provides web chat and voice call options to enhance customer convenience and has been an increasingly valuable tool in efficiently serving the public.

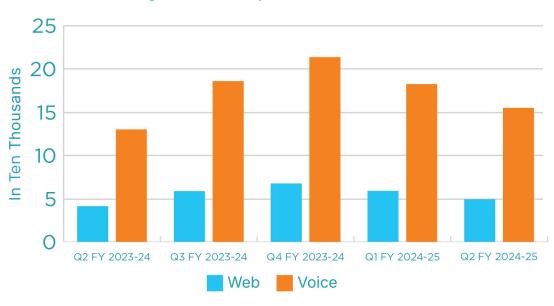


Figure 3: Quarterly ELI Web and Voice Totals

The total number of ELI Web Chats in Quarter Two was 49,270, and the total number of Voice Calls was 154,849. This quarter, ELI reached 2 million conversations since the measuring of its volume in 2022.

Most ELI contact happened within business hours, as opposed to outside of business hours, where 30,222 Web Chats (61.3%) and 146,144 Voice Calls (94.4%) were conducted. The Board of Nursing made up 35% of the total web chat volume this quarter.

The MQA Contact Call Center was offered 59,608 calls and 52,385 (or 88%) were answered. The average talk time was 5 minutes, 11 seconds.

ENFORCEMENT AT A GLANCE

As required by <u>section 20.43</u> and <u>Chapter 456</u>, Florida Statutes, MQA ensures that health care professionals follow the laws and regulations designed to protect public health, safety, and welfare. To fulfill this responsibility, MQA created the Bureau of Enforcement, which includes the Consumer Services Unit (CSU), Investigative Services Unit (ISU), Compliance Management Unit (CMU), and partners with Prosecution Services Unit (PSU). These units work together to receive, investigate, inspect, and resolve complaints about health care practitioners and facility owners.

M.O.D.E. INSPECTIONS

Imagine walking into a health care facility where every corner sparkles with cleanliness, every instrument is impeccably sterilized, and every practitioner is confidently following strict safety protocols. This environment isn't mere coincidence — it is the result of careful facility inspections and compliant facility owners. Facility inspectors are the unsung heroes of health care, ensuring that safety and sterility standards are consistently met for the benefit of both practitioners and the public.

This quarter, a total of 170 new M.O.D.E. inspections were completed. The average number of days to complete a new M.O.D.E. inspection this quarter is 5.1 days. This is well below the target goal of 10 days and reveals a steadfast commitment to regulatory efficiency.



Measure: The average number of days to complete a M.O.D.E. inspection.

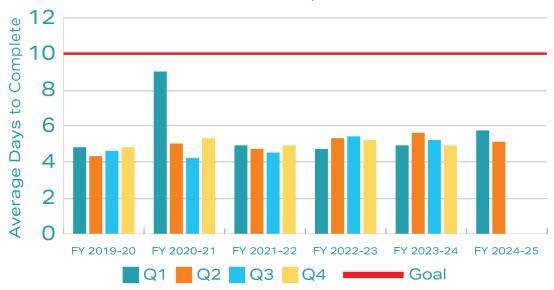


Definition: The average number of days from the date the facility requests inspection to the date the inspection is completed. This measure does not include those facilities that request a delay in inspection.



Goal: 10 days.

Figure 4: Average Days to Complete a New M.O.D.E. Inspection



PHARMACY INSPECTIONS

Pharmacy facility inspections are designed to ensure pharmacies adhere to established operational and practice standards, particularly in areas such as recordkeeping, inventory management, and the control of substances.

During Quarter Two, inspections for new pharmacies were completed in 7.4 days on average. Overall, MQA has consistently completed new pharmacy inspections well below the threshold of 14 days. There are 11,044 pharmacy facilities and establishments (pharmacies, nonresident sterile compounding pharmacies). Of the 1,451 pharmacy inspections, routine inspections were the most common at 91.0% of the inspections.

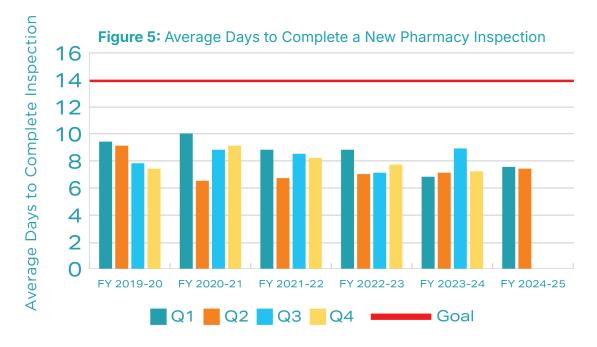


Measure: The average number of days to complete a pharmacy inspection.



Definition: The average number of days, from the date an applicant is ready for an opening inspection, to the date the inspection is completed.





COMPLAINTS

MQA received 7,170 complaints in Quarter Two, which is a 37.3% decrease from the previous quarter. 2,492 of these complaints were submitted through the online complaint portal. It took 3.3 days on average to process a complaint, which is a 51.5% decrease from last quarter.

1,726 cases were found legally sufficient, probable cause was found in 390 cases, no probable cause was identified in 996 cases, and 1,798 investigations were completed. There was an increase of 26.6% in investigations completed compared to last quarter.

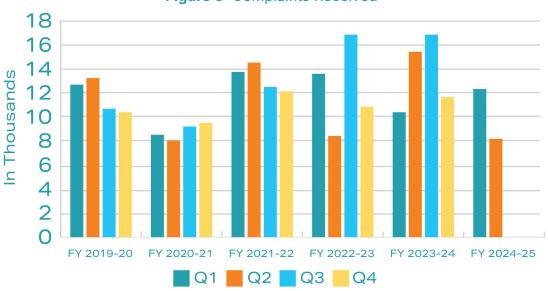


Figure 6: Complaints Received

THE PATH OF A COMPLAINT

Consumer Services Unit Where the complaint

process begins.

PCP



Probable Cause Panel

Determines if probable cause exists to further a complaint.

OPEN CASES

The Compliance Management Unit (CMU) had 5,215 open cases, the Consumer Services Unit (CSU) had 5,599 open cases (a 75.2% decrease from last quarter), the Investigative Services Unit (ISU) had 1,008 cases open, and the Prosecution Services Unit (PSU) had 5,622 open cases. The total number of open cases was 17,444, which is a 49.1% decrease from the previous quarter.



Figure 7: Number of Open Cases

EMERGENCY ORDERS

<u>Section 456.074</u>, Florida Statutes, grants PSU the authority to order an immediate stop to activities deemed an imminent threat to the public. These directives, referred to as Emergency Orders, are endorsed by the State Surgeon General. Emergency Restriction Orders (EROs) establish limits on a practitioner's professional activities under suspicion and Emergency Suspension Orders (ESOs) temporarily revoke the practitioner's license according to the order's terms.

During Quarter Two, PSU issued 61 total Emergency Orders (a 34.4% decrease from the previous quarter), 13 of which were Emergency Restriction Orders and 48 of which were Emergency Suspension Orders.

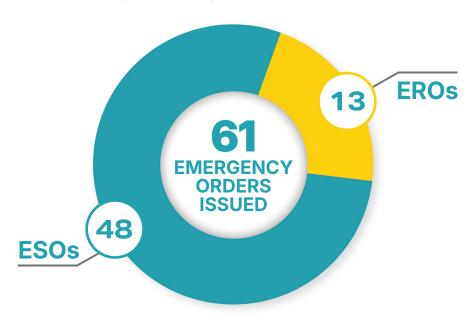
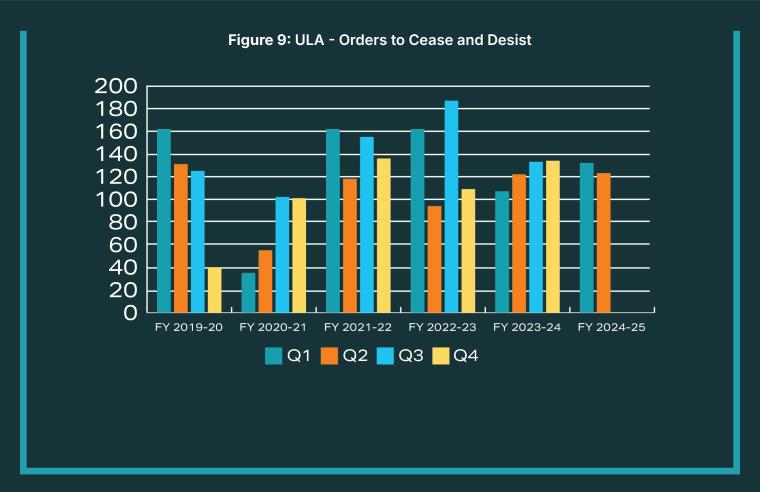


Figure 8: Emergency Orders Issued

UNLICENSED ACTIVITY INVESTIGATIVE SPOTLIGHT

MQA's Unlicensed Activity (ULA) Program helps the public understand the risks of receiving health care from unlicensed practitioners. According to section 456.072, Florida Statutes, providing medical care without a license can result in fines, penalties, and even jail time. The ULA Program works with law enforcement and state attorneys to investigate and take legal action against unlicensed practitioners, which helps protect the public and uphold professional standards.





262 ULA complaints were received, a 22.3% decrease from last quarter.



304 complaints were referred for further investigation, a 29.6% decrease from last quarter.



133 investigations were referred to law enforcement.



380 investigations were completed.



123 cease and desist orders were issued to unlicensed practitioners.

It should be noted that this data does not follow a fiscal year or quarterly timeline.

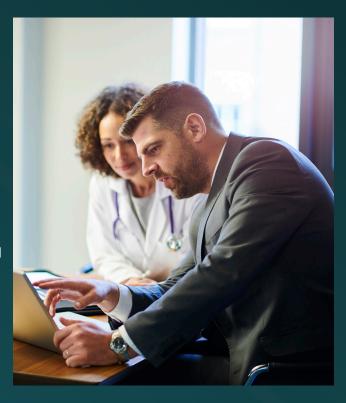
ULA Outreach

Outreach is a vital part of the ULA Program, helping the community understand the serious risks of using unlicensed health care services. The program usually focuses on big events to raise awareness, but its new goal is to also build strong relationships with local leaders, health advisors, and public health groups. This means the program now focuses on smaller, local events across Florida.

Through these efforts, MQA investigators explain not just the physical dangers, but also the mental and financial impacts of unlicensed health care. They cover the penalties for breaking the law, possible criminal charges, and how to report unlicensed health care practices.

ISU Field Office Meet-and-Greets

- Jackson Gardens Health and Rehab Center: Miami ISU hosted a meet-and-greet with employees and residents on Oct. 12, 2024.
- Michael-Ann Russell Jewish Community Center: Fort Lauderdale ISU visited this center on Oct. 22, 2024.
- First Judicial Circuit Law Enforcement
 Association: Pensacola ISU connected with
 participants of the association during a meeting
 on Oct. 24, 2024.
- Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR): Orlando ISU held a meet-and-greet with representatives from DBPR on Dec. 5, 2024.



De-Escalation and Wellness Expo

First Responders and Community De-Escalation and Wellness Expo was held in Tallahassee on Oct. 3, 2024. The event featured mental health vendors and financial wellness resources. This event was a great venue to spread awareness to local leaders.

Edward Waters University Job Fair

Jacksonville ISU attended the Edward Waters University Job Fair on Oct. 17, 2024. Hosted on campus, this event attracted students from diverse academic disciplines, many of whom were actively exploring employment opportunities as they approached graduation. Our investigators shared insights into examining unlicensed health care activity and provided guidance to prospective candidates on the application process.

Florida Crime Prevention Conference

Pensacola ISU presented a noteworthy presentation at the Florida Crime Prevention Conference, hosted by the Florida Crime Prevention Association, held Oct. 21-25, 2024. Founded in 1969, FCPA aims to increase awareness of crime prevention strategies and to network with other agencies on how to fight crime victimization. ISU's relationship with the FCPA is crucial to protecting, promoting, and improving the health of Florida residents and visitors.

Visit to the Kearney Center

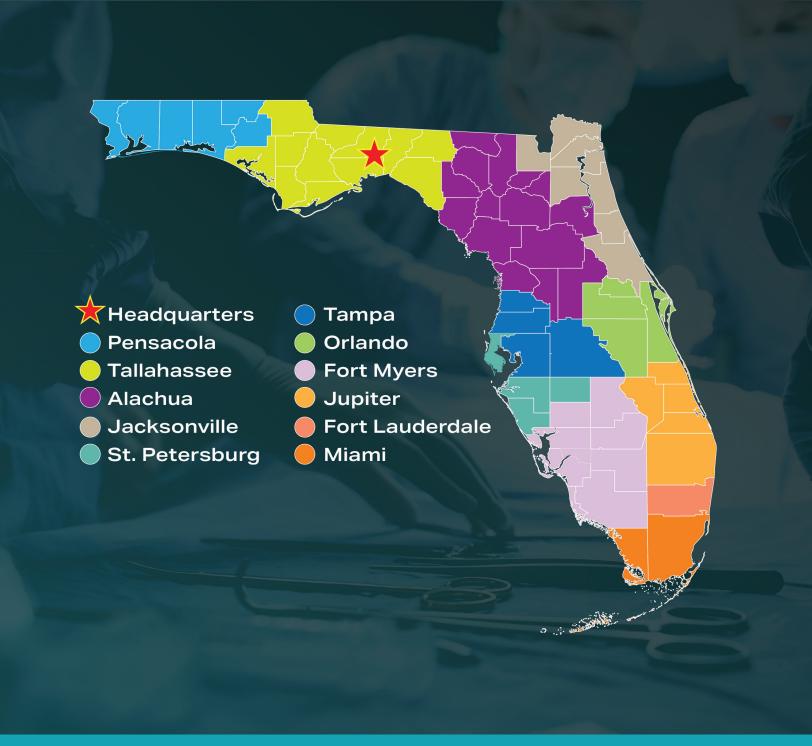
The ISU Headquarters team visited the Kearney Center Shelter on Nov. 20, 2024, where they provided valuable information on unlicensed activity and distributed essential items to attendees. The giveaway included beanie hats, hand sanitizers, promotional bags, socks, pens, and notepads. Many attendees were impressed to learn that the Florida Department of Health has a dedicated unit enforcing healthcare standards for medical professionals. This outreach effort at a local shelter demonstrates yet another way the Florida Department of Health is committed to protecting and supporting the residents of Florida, including those in need.

National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators Conference

The National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) Conference, held in Jacksonville, FL, from October 29 to November 1, provided an excellent opportunity for our investigators to deepen their understanding of the challenges involved in identifying drug diversion. The conference featured presentations on critical topics such as Drug-Free America, Enforcement Across Borders, Overcoming Addictions, and Utilizing Social Media to Combat Diversion. Additionally, the event offered valuable networking opportunities with representatives from various law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among attendees.

2024 Bureau of Enforcement Annual Training

Investigative Services Annual Training is specialized training that our investigators, inspectors, regulatory specialists, and managers attend each year to gain knowledge on various subjects such as Human Trafficking, Situational Awareness, and Report Writing. Due to several hurricanes that impacted Florida field offices, our organizing committee felt it was necessary to include sessions such as Resilience, Self-Care, Work-Life Balance, Mental Health, and Healthy Habits.



Call to Action 🔷









CALL VERIFY

BEWARE

If you suspect unlicensed activity, you can report what you know by submitting information through MQA's Online Complaint Portal or call 1-877-HALT-ULA to speak directly with an investigator.

MQA also encourages you to know before you go; verify that your practitioner has a license by looking them up via MQA's License Verification Portal and beware of the signs of unauthorized practice to detect when it may be happening, which can be found at FLHealthSource.gov/ULA.

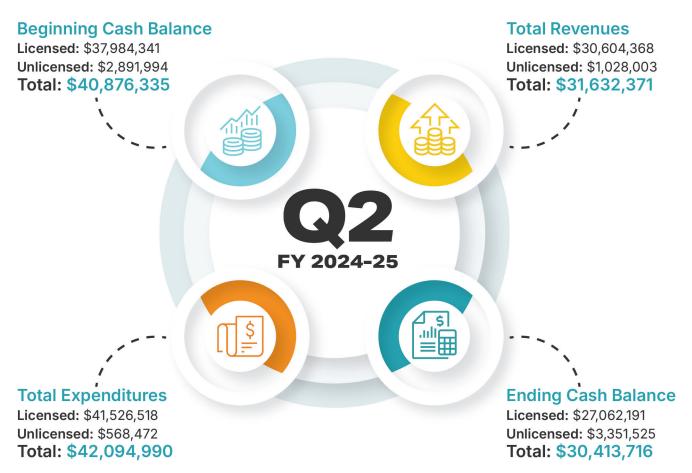
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Under the guidelines of section 456.025(9), Florida Statutes, MQA funds its operations through the collection of licensing fees and fines from health care practitioners, as well as enforcement actions. These revenues are allocated across the 22 regulatory boards and four councils responsible for overseeing daily licensing and enforcement tasks. In Quarter Two, regulatory fines and fees totaled \$627,319.96, with \$289,878.49 successfully collected.

Each practitioner's application fee includes a dedicated \$5 contribution toward enforcement efforts, with disciplinary action fines also augmenting this fund. These contributions are deposited into the MQA Trust Fund, which supports the regulation of practitioners and facilities. Regular quarterly financial reports on the fund's revenues and expenditures serve as a gauge for MQA's regulatory efficiency.

At the beginning Quarter Two, MQA reported an overall total cash balance of \$40,876,335, earmarked for licensing processes, program management, and marketing initiatives. This figure details all revenues, expenses, and the closing balance at the end of the quarter.

Quarter Two Revenues and Expenditures



GLOSSARY



Emergency Action

An action taken by the State Surgeon General to suspend or restrict the ability to practice when a licensed health care practitioner poses an immediate and serious threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Emergency Suspension Order (ESO)

An order issued by the Department suspending the license of a practitioner. A practitioner may not practice in the state of Florida while under an emergency suspension order.

Emergency Restriction Order (ERO)

An order issued by the Department restricting the practice of a practitioner in the state of Florida under conditions specified by the Department.

Final Order

An order of a regulatory board or the Department outlining the finding of facts, and penalties in a disciplinary case against a licensee. The administrative complaint outlining the charges against the licensee is attached and becomes part of the final order when filed with the agency clerk.

Investigations Completed

Investigations are initiated when a complaint is considered legally sufficient. All completed investigations are presented to the PSU with an Investigative Report and all documents related to the complaint.

Legally Sufficient

A complaint that contains ultimate facts that show that a violation of <u>chapter 456.073(1)</u>, Florida Statutes, of any of the practice acts relating to the professions regulated by the department, or of any rule adopted by the department or a regulatory board in the department has occurred.

MQA Trust Fund Unlicensed Activity Fee

A \$5 fee collected at initial and renewal licensing that funds the investigation and enforcement of unlicensed activities, according to Florida law.

Probable Cause

A determination that there is a reasonable basis to suspect that a person has violated or is violating the law.

Qualified Applicant

A qualified applicant has met all requirements to become licensed and may be licensed on the day an application has concluded processing. This is different from an approved applicant who may still have to pass an examination or meet an additional requirement outside of having an application approved.

Unlicensed Activity (ULA)

Unauthorized practice of a health care profession or delivery of health care or medical services by an individual not in possession of a valid or active license to practice that could cause injury, disease, or death.

CONTACT US

For more information or to contact us, please visit MQA's Virtual Agent, ELI, accessible on the board and council websites. ELI, powered by artificial intelligence, enhances the experience for health care applicants and practitioners by offering instant information and recommendations. ELI is available to answer inquiries through voice and online chat options 24/7.

CHAT NOW

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

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