

March 6, 2021

Andy Slavitt
White House Senior Advisor

Dear Mr. Slavitt,

Thank you for your leadership during this historic, challenging time. The achievements of the Biden Administration in expanding and streamlining the COVID-19 vaccine rollout across the United States have been immeasurable. We know that your team is focused on improving access to the vaccine for every American and bringing a swift end to this terrible pandemic.

As you well know, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on older Americans. Long term care and senior living communities (including nursing homes, assisted living communities and other congregate settings for older adults) have been considered the epicenter of the pandemic, as more than one million cases and 170,000 deaths have been linked to these communities across the country. The average age of residents in long term care (LTC) setting is 85, and almost everyone has an underlying health condition – if not multiple chronic conditions. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, the risk of mortality in this age group is 630 times higher than those 18 to 29 years old.

It is because of this that the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended prioritizing long term care residents and staff to receive the vaccine in December 2020. The CDC designed the Pharmacy Partnership for Long Term Care program to vaccinate this population efficiently and safely through three on-site clinics. This program was a huge success, hosting hundreds of thousands of clinics at long term care and senior living communities within just two and a half months of authorization. We are extremely grateful to the CDC and the federal government for creating this program and making this population a priority.

Deborah Meade
CHAIR
Health Management, LLC
Warner Robins, GA

Phil Fogg
VICE CHAIR
Marquis Companies
Milwaukie, OR

Phil Scalo
SECRETARY/TREASURER
Bartley Healthcare
Jackson, NJ

Michael Wylie
IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR
Genesis Health Care
Kennett Square, PA

Chris Wright
AT-LARGE MEMBER/
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE LIAISON
iCare Health Network
Manchester, CT

Joseph D. Mitchell
AT-LARGE MEMBER
Summit Care
Tallahassee, FL

Derek Prince
AT-LARGE MEMBER
HMG Healthcare
The Woodlands, TX

Sarah C. Schumann
AT-LARGE MEMBER
Brookside Inn Skilled Nursing Facility
Castle Rock, CO

Julianne Williams
AT-LARGE MEMBER
Dycora Transitional Health
Fresno, CA

J. Mark Traylor
INDEPENDENT OWNER MEMBER
Traylor Porter Healthcare
Opelika, AL

Steve Flatt
MULTIFACILITY MEMBER
National Healthcare Corporation
Murfreesboro, TN

Randy Bury
NOT FOR PROFIT MEMBER
The Evangelical Lutheran Good
Samaritan Society
Sioux Falls, SD

Ted LeNeave
REGIONAL MULTIFACILITY MEMBER
Accura HealthCare
Des Moines, IA

Helen Crunk, RN, BS
NCAL MEMBER
Pemberly Place Management &
Archer Place Medical Clinic
Lincoln, NE

Heath Boddy
ASHCAE MEMBER
Nebraska Health Care Association
Lincoln, NE

Betsy Rust
ASSOCIATE BUSINESS MEMBER
Plante Moran
Southfield, MI

Mark Parkinson
PRESIDENT & CEO

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Since the rollout of the vaccine, infections in long term care have decreased dramatically. Two recent analyses by the [New York Times](#) and the [American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living](#) (AHCA/NCAL) show infection rates in nursing homes are declining at a faster rate than the general population. Another [report](#), published by the Center for Policy Evaluation in Long Term Care, also shows a more rapid decline in cases among nursing homes after their vaccination clinics compared to nearby nursing homes that had yet to conduct their clinics.

While we are very encouraged by this data, more work remains. Vaccine hesitancy among staff has mirrored that of the larger population. A National Opinion Research Center [poll](#) in December showed that only about 47% of adults planned to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC estimates that after the first clinic at nursing homes, only 38% of staff chose to receive the vaccine. With continued reports of new variants as well as lack of data on the vaccines' impact on transmission, it is imperative we continue to increase vaccination rates in long term care. That is why LeadingAge and AHCA announced a nationwide goal to vaccinate 75% of nursing home staff by the end of June, and Argentum and ASHA have a similar goal for assisted living staff.

However, we cannot improve vaccine confidence and uptake without ongoing, consistent access. Currently, long term care and senior living communities are unsure of how they will secure COVID-19 vaccines after the conclusion of the Pharmacy Partnership Program for Long-Term Care. As of March 1, two-thirds of nursing homes have completed all three clinics. The effort to distribute vaccines to long term care and senior living communities will now transition to the LTC pharmacies enrolled in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. However, **there is currently no federal allocation of vaccine dedicated to long term care**, leaving the pharmacies and communities without direct access to more vaccine for new or previously unvaccinated residents and staff.

Each week, new admissions enter these communities, many of whom have not yet been vaccinated. In addition, new staff are hired weekly who have not been vaccinated. Existing staff or residents who were initially hesitant but are now willing to get the vaccine also deserve the opportunity to easily access it. Like the Pharmacy Partnership Program for Long-Term Care recognized, it is critical that vaccines be readily available to these communities directly, as many residents do not have the ability to travel to an off-site clinic. Additionally, [research](#) shows that uptake among staff members will increase substantially if it is offered while they are

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at work rather than asking them to find it on their own and in competition with all others in their community seeking appointments.

Long term care and senior living was left behind at the beginning of the pandemic; we cannot allow that to happen again. **Our associations are collectively asking the Administration to allocate between 50,000 and 75,000 doses per week to the LTC pharmacies participating in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program.** In addition, we request that priority allocations be designated for all older people who use long-term services and supports, and that provisions be made for providers who serve older people to host on site clinics and serve homebound people, regardless of where they live, starting in April when more supply is available. This will ensure equity across all older individuals, including those who have chronic conditions and functional impairments.

Granting this request would accomplish three things:

1. It will ensure that the success of the LTC program can continue.
2. Because an overwhelming percentage of our staff are women of color, it helps address equity issues.
3. It provides a decisive next step to vaccinating LTC facilities. Currently there is just no plan.

We understand that every single dose of vaccine is precious, and none should be wasted. As a result, we would understand if this commitment is made on a very short-term basis to allow you to review whether the vaccine is actually being used.

Thank you for again for your leadership and your attention to this very important manner.

Regards,

Mark Parkinson, President & CEO, AHCA/NCAL
Katie Smith Sloan, President & CEO, LeadingAge
James Balda, President & CEO, Argentum
David Schless, President, American Seniors Housing Association