



September 29, 2020

National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol Street, NW  
#267  
Washington, D.C. 20001

**Re: States Must Make Residents and Staff in Congregate Settings for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Priority for a COVID-19 Vaccine in its Distribution Plans to the CDC**

Dear Governors,

Thank you for your continued leadership in response to this unprecedented health crisis and the steps your administrations have taken to protect our residents and caregivers in nursing homes and assisted living communities from COVID-19.

On September 16, 2020, the Trump Administration released an outline of its strategy to quickly and reliably deliver COVID-19 vaccine doses to the American people, when a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. In its "Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations" for a COVID-19 vaccination program, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ask states and jurisdictions to submit plans on the administration and distribution of a vaccine by October 16, 2020.

Given that long term care facilities care for our most vulnerable when it comes to this virus and employ hundreds of thousands of essential health care workers, we urge that your plans to the CDC make residents and staff of these settings the highest priority for the vaccine. Long term care facilities are comprised of our nation's nursing homes, assisted living and memory care communities, intermediate care facilities for individuals with developmental disabilities, and independent living communities.

Those who reside in long term care facilities are especially susceptible to this novel virus. The average age of residents in our facilities is 85 and almost every one of them has an underlying health condition, and some have multiple chronic conditions. According to CDC data, the risk of mortality in this age group is 630 times higher than those 18-29 years old.

COVID-19 also runs counter to everything we know about infection control. Normal infection control is symptom related. What makes this virus particularly vicious is the fact that a person can contract it, show no symptoms and unknowingly spread it. Data shows that nearly 40 percent of individuals with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. The highly contagious nature of the virus in congregate settings, like long term care facilities, opens the door for rapid spread. The combination of these factors, as well as a severe lack of personal protective equipment and testing at the onset, has led to a disproportionate impact on long term care residents. [Current data](#) shows that while COVID-19 cases in all long term care facilities account for only 8 percent of total cases nationwide, they account for 41 percent of all COVID-19 related deaths.

These tragic deaths also include hundreds of long term care staff members who are responsible for the care and services of the residents. Since the start of the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of staff have fought on the frontlines, working night and day to protect those who are most at risk. The around-the-clock care they provide requires close contact with our residents. As a result, many have become infected with the virus. These individuals also are at risk of contracting the virus in their community. Even with the most stringent screening and testing protocols, the asymptomatic and virulent nature of this virus makes it impossible to truly prevent entry into the building.

This is why [independent research](#) from our country's top academic institutions shows that community spread of the virus is directly correlated with outbreaks in nursing homes. If it is spreading at a high rate in a local community, it is all but certain to result in outbreaks in long term care settings. If we can vaccinate

long term care residents and staff first, they will be less at risk in the event we see a rise in cases within our communities.

Visitation and engagement in social activities is important for our residents' health and wellbeing, and long term care providers are eager to help facilitate this. While recent steps have been taken to allow for safe visitation, it will continue to be restricted and limited until there is a vaccine. Additionally, a recent poll found that the vast majority of Americans support high-risk individuals receiving the vaccine first. This includes health care workers, seniors and people with compromised immune systems.

In many parts of the country, long term care was not prioritized at the start of the pandemic, but we can learn from this terrible tragedy. Members of our nation's greatest generation and the brave men and women who keep them safe deserve our support. Being among the first to receive a vaccine when it becomes available will help mitigate the risk and prevent further deaths.

Again, we appreciate your leadership and the support from your state public health agencies in helping long term care facilities respond to the unprecedented public health crisis. These state vaccination distribution plans are critical in setting the proper path forward and giving us a light at the end of a dark tunnel. We are grateful to the administrations that have already announced that their vaccine distribution plans will prioritize long term care residents and staff, and we hope all states and territories will follow suit.

AHCA/NCAL, along with our state affiliates, stands ready to work with you to help provide education and facilitate resources to long term care facilities regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, once it becomes available.

Sincerely,



Mark Parkinson  
AHCA/NCAL President & CEO



Scott Tittle  
NCAL Executive Director

cc: State Governors, Territory Governors, Mayor Muriel Bowser

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