

The Nursing Home COVID-19 Crisis: More is Needed to Protect Residents and Staff

On May 1 the Trump Administration announced a series of actions it is taking to address the rampant spread of the coronavirus in nursing homes. These actions include distribution of 14 days' worth of PPE to each nursing home, money for State Survey Agencies, a new rule on reporting cases and deaths, and the creation of a special commission on the coronavirus to assess response and make recommendations.

While these are steps in the right direction, they do not sufficiently address the widespread need in nursing homes, where more than 11,000 residents have died in the last two months due to COVID-19. Needed is a coordinated federal response for immediate action to stop the spread of COVID-19 and provide the necessary resources, assistance, and supplies to the states and front-line workers to get them through this crisis.

Comprehensive and immediate support are needed now to stem the frightening spread of this virus through facilities. That includes:

- **Access to sufficient PPE for the duration of the crisis.** While the 2-week supply by FEMA will assist many facilities as a stopgap measure, we are potentially facing several more weeks, if not months, of battling the spread of this infection in facilities. A coordinated effort to get PPE to states and facilities for the duration of this crisis is critical.
- **Required testing of all residents and staff and availability of testing kits.** Testing of all residents and staff on a periodic basis is needed to stop the spread of the virus, as well as be able to target interventions and resources to the most affected areas. At least three states (WV, MD, TN) and the Veterans Administration have now committed to testing all residents and staff. Testing must be required of all long-term care facilities and the necessary supplies must be made available.
- **Establishment of State Level Strike Teams** to provide coordinated efforts for assessing the conditions and needs in long-term care facilities and provide an efficient way to marshal resources and support to those areas that need it the most including PPE, testing kits, training, and clinical support.
- **Infection Control inspections of all facilities:** CMS's has directed states to use COVID-related funding to complete focused infection control surveys of nursing homes by July 2020. Onsite inspections are an important means of determining what is actually happening

in facilities. However, these surveys need to be conducted earlier than the targeted date of July 2020, and the harm caused by violations must be appropriately assessed and sanctioned.

- **Support for Direct Caregivers and Other Essential Workers involved in Providing Care.**
Those working in nursing homes provide not only the most personal care to residents, in many cases they are the residents' lifeline to society and the community. They are there every day, performing a challenging job for low wages and often no sick or leave time. Many staff work multiple jobs to make ends meet. As a society we can do better to recognize the essential services they provide by ensuring adequate compensation and benefits – including sick time and hazard pay.

Until we have stemmed the spread of the coronavirus in nursing homes, we must prioritize our efforts to protect this vulnerable population, for whom this infection has been so deadly.

For more information about COVID-19 and long-term care facilities, go to www.theconsumervoice.org.

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