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Contact: Kristin Hyde
206-491-0773

Advocates for Residents in Long Term Care Say Providers and States Are Throwing Gas on the Fire of Staffing Crisis

Washington, DC – As we hit the 2-year mark of the COVID-19 outbreak, staff and residents of long term care continue to pay the pandemic’s heaviest toll; more than 200,000 deaths, and having to live in fear of harm from isolation, stress, and poor quality care as a result of short-staffing. The catastrophic number of nursing home deaths over the past two years, including tens of thousands of “excess deaths” not related to COVID, raise serious questions about how residents are being protected or prioritized.

Now, making matters worse, some states are weakening staffing standards, placing residents further in peril. Lori Smetanka, Executive Director of The National Consumer Voice for Long-Term Care, commented:

“Rolling back minimum staffing standards during a crisis like this is like reducing the number of firefighters working during wildfire season. Long term care providers and state governments should be investing in ways to attract and retain qualified staff, not weakening staffing requirements. Inadequate staffing not only directly harms residents, it contributes to staff burnout and the high turnover that is compounding the crisis.”

Research shows there is a direct relationship between adequate staffing and quality care and quality of life for residents. Numerous studies have shown that facilities with higher levels of staffing had better COVID-19 outcomes during the pandemic. And there is well-documented evidence that inadequate staffing contributes to poor quality of care and poor health outcomes for residents.

Facilities have historically been understaffed and it's reached critical levels during the pandemic. There are no federal standards and state standards are inadequate. The result is that residents are not receiving care, medications, or social interaction with others.

Instead of finding real solutions to the problem, and ensuring that residents receive needed care and services, states are suspending staffing standards (NY, RI) or introducing legislation to roll back standards (FL).

Resident advocates say states and the federal government should be putting the needs of residents first by:

- implementing policies that support staff - raising wages, requiring benefits, supporting training programs;
- implementing federal standards for staffing either through legislation or administrative action; and,
- holding facilities accountable for ensuring that additional funding goes to support staff and direct care needs; and for ensuring that residents' receive necessary care and services.

Reducing staffing from 4 hours per resident per day to 3 hours per resident per day, for example, means residents are getting an hour less of direct care every day. When there are not enough staff:

- Residents sit in soiled clothes or bed sheets waiting longer for help, and putting them at risk for dangerous infections
- Residents may miss medication doses, or be delayed in getting the doses, which could result in chronic conditions not being treated properly, or the resident not receiving necessary pain medication, leading to unnecessary suffering
- Residents interact with fewer people in a day, increasing their isolation
- Staff are stretched thinner, increasing stress and driving down quality of care by increasing the likelihood of care tasks not being provided or shortcuts being taken. It also increases worker attrition, only compounding the underlying problem.

Said Smetanka, "Congress needs to act now to better protect residents of nursing homes by requiring minimum staffing requirements and accountability for the spending of public money. These critical measures will help ensure the tragic events of the COVID pandemic do not recur."

To speak with long term care resident advocates, residents or family members, please call Kristin Hyde 206-491-0773 or email kristin@kristinhyde.com

The National Consumer Voice is the leading national organization representing consumers on issues related to long-term care, helping to ensure that consumers are empowered to advocate for themselves. We are a primary source of information and tools for consumers, families, caregivers, advocates and ombudsmen to help ensure quality care for the individual.