

AHCA/NCAL COVID-19 Increase in Staffing Messaging

- Our health care heroes are on the frontlines battling COVID-19 and we have seen their extraordinary commitment to their residents during this pandemic. They deserve our respect and need ongoing support as they continue to battle this virus.
- As many states and long term care facilities ramp up testing and states begin to re-open, positive cases of COVID-19 will likely rise.
- Research indicates that anywhere between 25-50 percent of individuals are asymptomatic. This could include our health care heroes working in long term care facilities.
- Long term care is already facing a growing workforce shortage crisis due to staff members getting sick, a lack of available personal protective equipment (PPE), a lack of priority testing for staff, and school closures leaving staff members searching for childcare.
- AHCA/NCAL have long warned of workforce issues, including testifying before Congress last year.
- As increased testing identifies more staff with COVID-19 and re-openings result in more staff members being exposed to the virus through community spread, this will further exacerbate the existing workforce crisis.
- Residents in long term care facilities are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and they require round-the-clock care and support from dedicated professionals.
- States must take immediate action to help protect those currently on the frontlines and take proactive steps to recruit, train and deploy additional caregivers to ensure that residents continue to receive the daily care they need in long term care facilities.
- This is an “all hands-on deck” situation. Governors and state public health officials should explore ideas, such as:
 - Making long term care facilities a priority for PPE to protect current caregivers and residents from contracting the virus.
 - Making long term care facilities a priority for timely testing of staff and residents to identify asymptomatic carriers and empower facilities to respond in a targeted way. States need to support facilities in administering tests and covering costs.
 - Allowing nurses and other medical professionals to cross state lines and allowing facilities to hire temporary caregivers and support staff, which will require relaxing state regulations.
 - Encouraging medical professionals to volunteer like we’ve seen them do for our hospitals.

- Deploying the National Guard to specific facilities with outbreaks to help with cleaning, testing, PPE, and staff support.
- What we need now is for everyone to rally around nursing homes and assisted living communities the same way we have around hospitals.

Q&A on Staffing

Q: What should facilities do about staffing shortages?

A: In the near term, we are calling on states to allow nurses and other medical professionals to cross state lines and allow facilities to hire temporary caregivers and support staff. We also need continued support with PPE and testing to limit the spread of the virus.

But this is part of a longer-term issue and why we've been asking for help for years with recruiting more caregivers to long term care. This issue will not be fixed overnight. Once we get through this pandemic, we need Congress to support innovative programs that will help recruit, retain, and attract people to work in long term care to ensure our nation can support the needs of our residents and patients.

Q: Why don't direct caregivers (CNAs) and other support staff get paid more?

A: Direct caregivers, including CNAs, are health care heroes on the frontlines, and we have seen their extraordinary commitment to their residents during this pandemic. They deserve our respect and support in battling this virus. Many long term care providers are offering additional pay, or "hero pay," to caregivers who are working round-the-clock, and we appreciate any support from policymakers to help with ensure caregivers receive the support they deserve and have earned.

Ultimately, this is part of a longer-term issue and why we've been asking for lawmakers at the federal and state levels to work with us to update the funding model for long term care providers. This will be a focus of ours once we begin to emerge from the existing crisis.

Q: Do you support paid sick leave for employees?

A: It's important to keep in mind that like all other health care facilities, long term care facilities have to delicately balance ensuring that there are enough caregivers to properly aide residents and patients, while also making sure sick employees get the care they need and do not create additional risks to residents. Like many employers across our economy, however, long term care providers will need to work with lawmakers to ensure resources are available to cover unpredictable staffing costs associated with this historic crisis.

Q: What do you think about states re-opening and staff contracting the virus out in the larger community?

We understand and appreciate the need to begin re-opening businesses and getting our country back to work. Providers are eager to welcome visitors and volunteers back into their buildings. However, given the gravity of the situation we are facing and the threat the virus presents for our vulnerable residents, it is essential that long term care facilities have additional support from state and federal governments to reduce the spread of this deadly virus prior to reopening. The only way for our health care sector to keep our residents safe is to prioritize long term care facilities for universal testing, adequate PPE and additional staff.

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