



AHCA/NCAL COVID-19 Response Talking Points

- The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for all health care providers, including those caring for an extremely vulnerable population in long term care facilities.
- Health care workers at long term care facilities (including nursing homes, assisted living communities and ID/DD providers) are undertaking heroic work on the front lines of the pandemic.
- Despite repeated requests for assistance, long term care facilities have not been made a priority by public health agencies.
- Most facilities still lack adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) to stay safe despite caring for a vulnerable population (older adults with a high degree of underlying health conditions).
- The announcement made this week by Vice President Mike Pence that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will be expediting the direct shipment of PPE supplies to more than 15,000 nursing homes across the country is welcomed news. These supplies can't come soon enough.
- The biggest challenge long term care facilities face is access to testing. Monday's announcement from the federal government that long term care residents and staff with symptoms are now in the highest priority level for testing is a step in the right direction. But more needs to be done.
- Lack of adequate and timely testing has forced providers to rely on a symptoms-based approach. This will not prevent the spread of COVID-19 since many people who have the virus can spread it without showing symptoms.
- Long term care facilities need to be able to test all residents and all staff so that asymptomatic carriers can be isolated.
- As nursing homes and assisted living communities are able to ramp up testing, positive cases of COVID-19 will likely rise. But that means that facilities will be able to make targeted decisions to prevent further spread and quickly determine where resources should be allocated, better protecting both caregivers and residents.
- Testing delays and inadequate PPE have caused workers to become ill and miss work, creating staffing shortages in many facilities. In most cases, facilities are not receiving the same staffing support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Guard and volunteer corps that other medical providers are receiving.



- Federal, state and local governments must focus resources and attention on long term care facilities. Without adequate PPE and access to testing, more residents and staff will become ill and further overwhelm hospitals.
- Despite the challenges, people are recovering. The overwhelming majority of long term care residents who test positive ultimately recover and caregivers remain committed to serving their residents, who they have come to know as family.
- It is time to rally around our seniors and health care heroes and give long term care facilities the support they need and deserve.
- The final resource that is urgently needed is funding. Specifically, nursing homes and assisted living communities need the federal government, through HHS, to set up an emergency relief fund to help long term care caregivers and residents. Just like they did for hospitals.
- Providers are currently shouldering the burden of additional hero pay for our frontline caregivers, testing for staff, hiring additional workers to prevent shortages, and more – all to protect residents from COVID-19.
- Without adequate funding and resources, long term care facilities will not be able to overcome this unprecedented health crisis and protect our residents and caregivers.

Q&A – AHCA/NCAL State Members & Affiliates

Q: How are long term care facilities helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities?

A: We are taking unprecedented steps to contain the virus. We are following government orders to restrict visitor access and many facilities have taken targeted steps to reduce spread, such as creating isolation wings for those who have the virus so they are separated from the other residents and are cared for by dedicated staff who do not interact with those in the rest of the building.

Q: How has the nationwide shortage of PPE affected long term care facilities?

A: Most long term care facilities still lack the ability to acquire the PPE they need to stay safe, despite caring for those who are the most vulnerable to the virus. Without proper PPE, health care workers in these facilities cannot stay safe. We applaud Vice President Pence's recent announcement that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will be expediting PPE supplies to over 15,000 nursing homes.

Q: Why aren't long term care facilities getting the help they need?

A: The public health system has not made long term care facilities a priority. Despite asking for help, we still lack adequate PPE and access to testing. We need to rally around nursing homes and assisted living communities and give them the support they need.

Q: Why has it taken so long for residents and staff to get tested?



A: Generally, long term care residents and staff have not been prioritized for immediate testing. The recent announcement from the Administration to make symptomatic long term care residents and staff a priority for testing is a positive step, but more needs to be done. We need state and federal agencies to give us the financial resources needed to support our testing needs, including testing of all residents and staff regardless of if they are exhibiting symptoms. This is the only way to identify all carriers of the virus and halt the spread to protect our residents and caregivers.

Q: If adequate testing isn't available, how are you identifying new cases in your facilities?

A: Many facilities are forced to rely on a symptoms-based approach to identify new cases of the virus. But this will not help stop the spread of the virus since people can transmit it without showing symptoms. This is why the need for increased testing is so urgent. We need to be able to test all residents and all staff. We need to rally around nursing homes and assisted living communities and give them the support they need.

Q: What are you doing about workers who become ill?

A: Unfortunately, lack of adequate PPE and access to testing has caused many of our workers to become ill. As they recover under quarantine at home, many facilities are suffering from staffing shortages. In most cases, facilities are not receiving the same staffing support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Guard and volunteer corps that other medical providers are receiving.

Q: How can long term care facilities reduce the number of illness and deaths that are occurring?

A: We need federal, state and local governments to step in and make us a priority. Our health care workers are on the frontlines and doing heroic work. They need PPE and adequate testing to stay safe and keep residents healthy. Without these essential resources, more residents and staff will become ill and further overwhelm our hospitals. We can make this better. We need to rally around long term care providers and give them the support they need.

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