



March 11, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA), I want to thank you for all that you are doing to address the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). As you consider further actions and guidance, especially in communications to state and local health agencies, I strongly urge you to recognize the critical role seniors housing providers, ie. Independent Living (IL), Assisted Living (AL), Memory Care (MC), and Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs), play in preventing and mitigating the spread of COVID-19 within senior living communities and take steps to prioritize programs and supplies so they are available to our residents and staff

While there is still much to be learned about this virus, we do know the most at-risk population is the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. **These are the very people we serve.** Specifically, ASHA represents over 550 companies/6,000 communities involved in the operation, development, investment, and financing of the entire spectrum of seniors housing. The residents of our communities tend to be more vulnerable to communicable diseases given their age and health status. The average resident living in an Assisted Living Community is in their 80s and requires assistance with three or more activities of daily living (ADLs) and/or suffers from Alzheimer's disease or related dementia.

Currently, our members are significantly challenged by the scarcity of N-95 masks, gowns, gloves antiseptic wipes and hand sanitizer and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Without adequate supplies of PPE and test kits, the challenge ahead will be significant. We were pleased that Congress quickly approved the emergency supplemental appropriations package in response to COVID-19, and also encouraged that HHS will release supplies of N-95 masks from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). Our members are not nursing homes, hospitals or first responders, but we are very much on the front lines of this rapidly evolving outbreak, expediting sound preparation and response plans to protect both residents and caregivers. As supplies become available, it is important that senior living is included among priority recipients and that direction is communicated to state and local health departments or other agencies who will be in charge of dissemination. Our members can be the best defense against the spread of this virus, but it requires having adequate tools i.e., supplies and information to be successful.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues. If you have any questions please feel free to reach out to Jeanne McGlynn Delgado, ASHA V.P. of Government Affairs at 202-885-5561 or jeanne@seniorshousing.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Schless".

David Schless
President
American Seniors Housing Association

CC: The Honorable Seema Verma, Administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
The Honorable Robert Kadlec, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, HHS