



December 2, 2020

Governor Andrew Cuomo, Chair
Governor Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 N. Capitol St NW, Ste. 267
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Governors Cuomo and Hutchinson:

With the FDA approval of COVID-19 vaccines imminent, Operation Warp Speed leaders have indicated that 40 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine could be available to the states as early as next week. This is wonderful news. Yesterday, the ACIP voted to make health care workers and elderly people living in long-term care facilities top priority for access to the COVID-19 vaccines in the United States. This too is wonderful news.

As the trade association that represents the senior living industry, the American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA), is very encouraged by the prospect of a vaccine and priority access assigned to those who live and work in our communities.

Now as decision-making moves to the state level, we ask that the NGA endorse the strategy set out by the ACIP. Further we ask that you encourage your colleagues in the states to adopt these recommendations so that we can be assured that the most vulnerable among us, the seniors living in our communities and the staff who serve them, have a fighting chance against this virus -- especially as we head into the winter months ahead.

ASHA represents the owners and operators who provide housing and care in assisted living, independent living, memory care, and continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) to those most vulnerable to COVID-19 in our society. These operators have been serving on the front lines of this pandemic since late February-early March, working tirelessly and compassionately to keep safe the almost 1.9 million residents who call "senior living" home and the approximately 1 million employees who serve them.

The ACIP made a strong and compelling case for their recommendations. Our members can attest to the challenges of keeping a community safe. Until a vaccine is available, there is no ability to maintain a zero risk environment in communities where staff must come and go every day and interact with residents who are the most susceptible to contracting the virus. The message that "help is on the way" was underscored when HHS and DoD announced agreements with CVS and Walgreens to provide and administer COVID-19 vaccines to residents of long-term care facilities (LTCF) nationwide including senior living, with no out-of-pocket costs. This announcement stated, "Protecting especially vulnerable Americans has been a critical part of the Trump Administration's work to combat COVID-19, and LTCF residents may be part of the prioritized groups for initial COVID-19 vaccination efforts until there are enough doses available

for every American who wishes to be vaccinated.” Our members have enrolled in this program and are encouraged that they will soon see some relief from the nightmare that has taken so many lives living in our communities and other long term care facilities across the country.

Most importantly, while the ACIP recommendations include assisted living and other residential care communities in their description of long-term care facilities, it is crucial that states expressly recognize these communities. Too often policymakers assume the terms “skilled nursing facilities” or “nursing homes” are all inclusive of the long-term care spectrum of settings. They are not. As indicated above, senior living includes assisted living, independent living, memory care and CCRCs. However, in terms of frailty, age and needs, the resident population is similar. For example, the average resident of a senior living community is 85 years old and is typically affected by multiple comorbidities, making them significantly more vulnerable to further complications from COVID-19 exposure.

The senior living industry is committed to continuing to do whatever it takes to keep our residents and staff safe. With the tools to keep people safe and out of the hospital, senior living residents, staff and the overall health care system benefits.

Please adopt the ACIP allocation strategy that places health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities including senior living in priority status for distribution of the vaccine.

Please encourage state governors to do the same. Please reach out to Jeanne McGlynn Delgado at jeanne@seniorshousing.org with questions.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

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

David Schless
President
American Seniors Housing Association

cc: State Governors