



January 14, 2021

Dear President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris:

The American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA) offers sincere congratulations to you on your victory in the 2020 Presidential election.

We are eager to get to work in partnership with you both and your Administration on the critical issues facing the senior living industry and bring to light the significant benefits our industry offers to our residents, their families, our member's staff, and the greater health care system.

We are encouraged that you have made COVID-19 response and recovery a top priority. As you work to advance your plans for COVID-19 vaccine distribution and increased testing capabilities as well as the development of legislative proposals for pandemic relief, our members and staff stand ready to offer support for this critically important agenda. COVID-19 has hit the senior living industry and its residents extremely hard and we are eager to bring our expertise to the table in efforts to support your agenda.

Specifically, as you work to advance vaccine distribution and consider additional COVID-19 stimulus relief measures, we urge you to consider the following:

- 1) Continue to support the prioritization of residents and staff in long term care settings for **initial** vaccine distribution. The Long-Term Care (LTC) Pharmacy Program should be continued and **expanded** to include all vulnerable seniors living in congregate care settings including independent living settings, which are currently being overlooked. It is critical that this directive be instituted in federal and state plans before access is expanded to younger age groups. These seniors are the most at risk of contracting and dying from the virus and should be given priority status until supply of vaccine is significantly ramped up. Please consider the following:
 - The average age of residents living in independent living and assisted living is 82 and 85, respectively.
 - To date only 25% (or 4.5 million) of first doses of vaccine have been delivered for use in the LTC Pharmacy Program (CVS, Walgreens, and others). There is much work to do.
 - The LTC Pharmacy Program does not include all senior congregate care settings. Independent Living residents **MUST** be included in this program before expanding access to younger populations or they will be overlooked.
 - If these residents must compete with 65-year-olds for access, they will be seriously disadvantaged. It is very difficult for these older seniors to manage for themselves scheduling, record keeping, transport and monitoring of side effects if forced to seek vaccination at a local arena or parking lot clinic. The clinics must come to them.
 - The LTC Pharmacy Program is the most efficient and safe way to get this vaccine to all seniors living in congregate care settings, including assisted living and independent living in addition to nursing homes.

- As health care professionals, all those working in congregate care settings must also be vaccinated. They work closely and intimately with residents every day. All efforts to keep staff members safe must be pursued so they can continue to serve on the front lines over the next several months as this virus surges across the country.
 - Consideration must also be given to mandating the vaccine for these employees. We are in the midst of a public health crisis and vaccine hesitancy among staff who work closely with seniors risks the lives of all who work and live in these communities. Voluntary participation is always the goal. However, we urge consideration of policies that our industry can rely on to ensure that all our collective efforts to address this crisis are not undermined by unvaccinated staff.
- 2) Recognize the outstanding efforts of the senior living industry in helping to keep our residents safe and include financial relief to help this vital industry recover from the significant financial toll the pandemic has taken. The annual financial impact to the industry is on track to reach \$17 billion dollars and Provider Relief Funds to date have been limited. We urge a targeted fund be created for the senior living industry to help defray COVID-19 related costs and revenue loss. There remains much work to do in the coming months and we must be prepared.

ABOUT ASHA

ASHA is the leading national association exclusively dedicated to supporting companies operating professionally managed, resident-centered and predominately private pay senior living communities. Our member companies offer the full range of senior living communities including independent living, assisted living, memory care, and continuing care retirement communities. ASHA represents over 550 companies who collectively own and operate more than 700,000 units across the country.

We thank you for your consideration of these immediate needs and look forward to working with you and your Administration to advance policies that improve the lives of seniors, and those who serve them. We also ask that you recognize the contributions of this industry in fighting the current pandemic. Please consider their needs going forward, so we can ensure these communities come out of this crisis financially sound to continue this necessary and critical work.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Jeanne McGlynn Delgado, ASHA's VP of Government Affairs at Jeanne@seniorshousing.org.

Again, congratulations and best wishes in the coming days.

Sincerely



David Schless
President
American Seniors Housing Association