



ASHA Statement regarding

COVID-19 Report in Assisted Living Facilities – July 2, 2020

Senator Elizabeth Warren / Senator Edward Markey / Representative Carolyn Maloney

The American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA) appreciates Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Edward Markey and Representative Carolyn Maloney calling attention to the COVID-19 related challenges inherent in keeping residents and staff safe in assisted living. We know that this virus disproportionately targets vulnerable seniors living in congregate settings and can be transferred asymptotically. Therefore, we are encouraged by their recommendation that these communities should be prioritized for access to rapid results testing kits for residents and staff and adequate supplies of PPE to effectively combat this virus. That prioritization should also apply to future vaccines. We also agree with the recommendation that the federal government should provide financial support to assisted living operators to help with the extraordinary costs they have incurred to try and keep their residents and staff safe. Both recommendations are vital for the health and safety of our nation's frailest seniors and those who care for them in assisted living.

The report, however, falls short in other areas that are worth noting:

The report compares assisted living COVID-related cases to the general U.S. population which is extremely misleading. The population residing in assisted living have much different rates of cognitive and functional impairment than the general population. In fact, the prevalence of certain chronic conditions among this population creates a higher risk for poor outcomes from COVID-19 compared to those in private housing in the community. The attached report that was commissioned by ASHA, (*Considerations for Balancing Seniors Housing Residents' Safety as Communities Reopen: A Strategic Approach to the COVID-19 Pandemic by Anne Tumlinson of ATI Advisory*) details the health-related considerations that are central to understanding the impact of COVID-19 in assisted living.

The congressional report is also misleading in that it suggests that because there is no federal requirement to report COVID-19 activity, assisted living providers are deficient in reporting their COVID-related incidents to government agencies. The reality is, however, that assisted living oversight takes place at the state level. Assisted living settings across the country are regularly reporting COVID-related incidents to their state and local health departments. The report fails to mention that COVID-related policies have almost exclusively been made at the state and local level since the onset of this crisis, and the assisted living industry adheres to these and other reporting requirements.

Finally, the report fails to describe the numerous and significant steps that have been taken by assisted living providers since the outset of the pandemic to mitigate the risk and spread of infection. The report does not include any of the requested and reported information about the efforts undertaken by the operators to prepare and respond to this health crisis. From the beginning of the pandemic, assisted living operators halted or greatly curtailed new move-ins, initiated hero pay and other incentives to reward dedicated staff members for their commitment to provide necessary resident care and services, enhanced cleaning and infection control protocols, stopped outside visitation, delivered meals to residents in their apartments, and worked creatively to engage residents to avoid the harmful effects of isolation.

The senior living industry is serving on the front lines of this pandemic and should be recognized for the significant contribution they are making in combating COVID-19. With adequate supplies, reliable and affordable testing and working capital, this industry will be equipped to continue the battle against this deadly virus. We look forward to working with Congress and the Administration going forward on these important issues.