



Monday, May 4, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

Thank you for your leadership and efforts to address the coronavirus crisis, which poses a grave and growing threat to millions of older adults and the people who care for them.

LeadingAge represents more than 5,000 nonprofit providers of aging services, including nursing homes, assisted living, life plan communities, community-based services providers, home health and hospice – the entire continuum of care. LeadingAge also represents the majority of federally assisted senior housing providers who have somewhat different testing needs than those in this letter.

These aging service providers, where older people receive long-term services and supports, are essential partners in the nation's battle against the novel coronavirus. They must be able to test residents and staff, using valid, approved tests that produce results quickly.

Aging services providers can take steps to prevent the spread of COVID19 and protect the older adults they serve, if they have the tools and supports to test immediately and repeatedly. CMS guidance released on April 19 requires nursing homes to report diagnosed cases of COVID to the CDC National Healthcare Safety Network as well as public health authorities, pending release of a CMS interim rule. Without accurate testing, it is going to be nearly impossible to report accurately.

LeadingAge requests funding and operational support for all aging services providers in the form of on-site availability of COVID19 testing and in the rapid receipt of results (within 24 hours) from testing for all residents and staff. Notably, health care workers who serve older adults in homes and community settings were conspicuously absent from the CDC's April 27 update to *Priorities for COVID-19 Testing* in [Evaluating and Testing Persons for COVID 19](#).

To address the severe impact that lack of adequate and timely testing has on the care of older adults, the health and availability of the staff who care for them, and the overall spread of the virus, we specifically request:

1. Prioritization of all aging services providers' staff for testing (both symptomatic and asymptomatic), in the same top priority tier as those listed by the CDC, above.
2. Prioritization of all aging services providers' persons-served who live in congregate settings (both symptomatic and asymptomatic) for testing, in the same top priority tier as those listed by the CDC, above.
3. Funding and operational support for on-site testing for all aging services staff and persons-served, with rapid results (24 hours) and at repeat intervals (frequent enough to prevent the spread of infection).

Thank you for your ongoing support and consideration of the distinct and urgent testing needs of older adults and the people who serve them during this unprecedented crisis. LeadingAge agrees with the point made in a bipartisan letter to you from 26 members of the Senate: "As you know, our nursing homes and senior living facilities are experiencing serious shortages of needed staffing and protective equipment during the COVID-19 public health emergency...We must ensure these supplies are flowing to the providers who are on the front lines of caring for some of our nation's most vulnerable – our seniors."

For questions or further discussion, please contact Ruth Katz, Senior Vice President, Policy (rkatz@leadingage.org).

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Smith Sloan
President and CEO, LeadingAge