



March 9, 2021

Dr. Cameron Webb
Senior Policy Advisor for COVID-19 Equity
White House COVID-19 Response Team

Dear Dr. Webb,

Thank you for your excellent commentary on the town hall LeadingAge cosponsored this past Thursday night with the Black Coalition Against COVID. Your recognition of the different experiences of COVID for older people gave so many of our members and their staff confidence that top leaders in the White House recognize what they are going through.

The undersigned organizations together represent providers of aging services across the continuum of care. Staff and residents of some of our provider member communities were included in the Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care – nursing homes, assisted living providers, and HUD Section 202 communities. The Partnership has had a dramatic impact on the ability of the people in these communities to stay healthy and have some hope of a “normal life” at some point soon.

However, many staff and residents in these communities are not yet vaccinated. These settings are dynamic. After the third Partnership clinic, previously reluctant staff continue to change their minds; new staff arrive; and new residents arrive.

Further, there are far more equally vulnerable older individuals who live in other types of residential settings that were not included in the Partnership. This includes older people in independent living settings, such as affordable housing and private-pay communities. Typical residents in these settings are much older and experience more functional impairments and chronic health conditions than those in the surrounding community.

Others are served in community settings, such as adult day and PACE centers. Many live in their own homes in the community, often with informal caregivers. Some are homebound. No provisions have been made to get them vaccinated.

It is not enough to leave the allocation, access, and delivery decision-making to individual states. State health departments are understandably focused on more broad scale rollout of vaccines to all older people, and soon, all adults. We must not lose focus on the most vulnerable elders. And we must intentionally attend to the equity challenges in aging services, including racial equity. The long-term care workforce is predominantly people of color, as are residents of affordable housing across the nation.

We will all need to continue to work together to encourage, educate, and reach older people and the staff who serve them. We are encouraged by your obvious personal commitment and transparency and the coordination and focus at the highest levels of the Biden Administration.

On that note, we are writing to request that the Administration take three key steps to maintain the momentum to ensure older people, particularly the most vulnerable among them, have access to COVID immunizations. These steps are consistent with and build upon those outlined in a letter we co-signed to Andy Slavitt. Our three requests are:

- Directly allocate vaccine doses to Retail Pharmacy Program participating long-term care and other pharmacies that are willing to offer onsite clinics (including mobile clinics) to residential communities (including independent living), adult day health, and PACE settings. Many of these providers do not have a partnership with a LTC pharmacy.
- Make a public statement about the Administration’s commitment to connecting homebound older people and their caregivers to vaccines, followed by plans to activate the connection. By homebound older adults we mean adults who cannot leave their homes and other older adults who would struggle to access a mass vaccination site (e.g., those dependent on oxygen, mobility limitations or moderate cognitive impairment).
- Publicly prioritize those who work in aging services as a population of focus – similar to the announcement prioritizing teachers – and encourage states to target them in allocations and plans to administer the shots.

We commend the Biden Administration for your commitment to equity. For all of these yet to be vaccinated individuals and the staff who serve them, we seek continued federal policies that focus on their unique situations and their greater need. The federal government made a lot of progress with the Partnership. It’s essential to keep up the progress with these vulnerable, prioritized individuals.

In addition to demonstrating the Biden Administration’s commitment to equity, sending a clear message that these older individuals – those most vulnerable to potential COVID infection with serious consequences – are not forgotten. They too can dare to hope for a better outlook on the other side of the pandemic.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these ideas.

Sincerely,

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