



February 9, 2021

Bobby Scott, Chair  
Education & Labor Committee

Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member  
Education & Labor Committee

Frank Pallone, Chair  
Energy & Commerce Committee

Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member  
Energy & Commerce Committee

Richard Neal, Chair  
Ways & Means Committee

Kevin Brady, Ranking Member  
Ways & Means Committee

On behalf of LeadingAge's more than 5,000 nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-minded organizations that touch millions of lives every day, I write to urge you to act quickly and pass a robust, comprehensive COVID-19 relief bill to help protect older adults and those who serve them throughout the country. Older adults and the providers who serve them continue to be at the center of the pandemic storm.

Specifically, we request your support for the following health care provisions in the relief bill under consideration:

- **Vaccines:** A fully funded, coordinated vaccination program to deliver vaccines to all older adults and those who serve them across residential and non-residential settings. Critically, we want to be sure that appropriate funding and resources exist to continue to vaccinate new residents and staff in residential communities that were part of the Federal Pharmacy Partnership that will be ending. It is vitally important to include the independent living populations of both life plan communities and stand-alone independent living communities in any federal program that funds and offers on-site vaccination clinics for the older adults who reside there. Additionally, the funding should be adequate to ensure access to vaccinations for those health care workers who did not have access to the Pharmacy Partnership and community-dwelling older adults, including those who are homebound.
- **Testing:** A fully funded, coordinated national testing program that covers all older adults and those who serve them. The program should include funding for testing supplies, PPE, and staff time for testing, record-keeping, and reporting. In accordance with ongoing public health guidance, non-diagnostic, surveillance testing will still be a critical component of the overall COVID-19 response effort. Currently, that testing is not covered by any payment source and needs to be—for both aging services staff and those they serve. Where possible, we ask that these test results to be included in genome sequencing studies that evaluate for the presence of the fast-spreading COVID variants, including B.1.1.7 (UK variant) and N501Y (South African variant).

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Ensure access to PPE through consistent and sufficient manufacturing, national and state stockpiles with enough quantity, a clear process for distribution as needed, and funding to pay for PPE.
- **Workforce:** The pandemic has exacerbated the critical workforce shortages already facing aging services. Workers on the front line are exhausted and need support. We ask that Congress provide “Hero’s Pay”—targeted funds—to increase frontline staff wages. Congress should also continue funding for strike teams to relieve nursing home staffing shortages and funds to fulfill the President’s commitment for fully funding access to National Guard units to provide additional staffing relief when long-term care facilities experience unmanageable staffing shortages within their facilities. Additionally, support the Administration for Community Living’s effort to carry out a Direct Care Workforce Demonstration to help LTC facilities implement retention and recruitment efforts that could be effective during the pandemic.
- **Provider Relief Fund (PRF):** Aging services providers will continue to need financial relief to help them through, and to recover from, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on experience, at least an additional \$120B will be needed for the **Provider Relief Fund** to address the current needs of all health care providers, and of that amount, \$40-50B should be designated specifically for aging services providers to continue to meet the lower occupancy levels providers are experiencing, especially if the costs related to testing, personal protective equipment, and vaccines are not otherwise covered by the federal government. In addition, providers should be able to utilize the PRF received for up to 6 months after the end of the pandemic to provide adequate time to phase back into pre-pandemic service levels. We would also support procedural refinements to the current PRF program regarding the application process, distribution of funds, and reporting. We would be happy to provide additional comments on the current program.
- **Paycheck Protection Program:** As set out in detail in the attached letter, provide additional funding for loan and grant programs, such as the Paycheck Protection Program, with concomitant requirements for transparency in administration and expanded eligibility for first and second draw loans.
- **Medicare sequestration:** Continue the moratorium on Medicare sequestration. Providers are facing ongoing costs beyond all expectations for supplies, temporary staff, infrastructure, and other necessary expenses to fight and recover from the pandemic.
- **Additional Funds to Support Home and Community-Based Service Providers:** Home and community-based services (HCBS) are a vital part of the aging services infrastructure whose financial needs have not been met throughout the pandemic. We ask for additional funding, through a 10-point HCBS FMAP increase and/or other allocations (e.g., Provider Relief Fund payments) to help our HCBS members to reopen and/or to sustain their services. We also ask

that there be specific guardrails accompanying any FMAP increase to ensure that a certain percentage is spent on HCBS providers.

- **Telehealth:** Authorize reimbursement for telehealth services for home health and for certain audio-only visits for PACE organizations consistent with other members of the continuum during the public health emergency. Provide additional funding to help alleviate isolation in nursing homes and low-income housing.

Congress must pass a comprehensive COVID-19 relief bill now. Thank you for your continued efforts to address the critical health and economic impact of this pandemic. We strongly agree with the need for broad-based legislation to get this pandemic under control. Please contact Ruth Katz, senior vice president for policy and advocacy ([rkatz@leadingage.org](mailto:rkatz@leadingage.org)), for further information.

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