



## **LeadingAge Statement on Vaccine Mandates For Healthcare Workers**

7/26/21

Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020, older adults and their professional caregivers have been disproportionately at risk—from the virus itself and from our nation's lack of preparedness for a catastrophic public health crisis. LeadingAge has spoken out on behalf of our membership of over 5,000 mission-driven and nonprofit providers of long-term care and other aging services, pleading with state and federal officials to prioritize long-term care for resources, support and, most importantly, for vaccines.

The federal government responded, and access to the COVID vaccine has been the most important development of the pandemic for older adults and the people who care for them. Everyone in healthcare and aging services has been working around the clock to steadily increase vaccination rates. Today over 80% of nursing home residents are fully vaccinated, and COVID deaths have plummeted from a high of over 6,000 weekly in December 2020 to just 130 in May 2021.

As new variants of COVID emerge and proliferate, even fully vaccinated older adults in long-term care seem to be at risk, including from the unvaccinated staff who care for them. Nursing home staff vaccination rates vary widely across the country, with a national rate of just over 61%.

LeadingAge strongly urges all residents and staff in long-term care to get vaccinated. Further, to protect the most vulnerable older adults from breakthrough cases and new COVID variants, LeadingAge supports requiring vaccines for current and new staff in long-term care and other healthcare settings. As the most effective tool to protect from the virus, COVID-19 vaccination should be a condition of employment for all healthcare workers, including employees, contract staff and others, with appropriate exemptions for those with medical reasons or as specified by federal or state law.

Our position reflects the ethical obligation of providers to deliver safe, quality care to the older adults and others they serve, and also the most recent scientific evidence available. Critical factors include:

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe.
- COVID-19 vaccines are effective for preventing infection, and especially severe illness and death.
- COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- COVID-19 vaccines, like all vaccines, are not 100% effective, so breakthrough infections can happen.
- Older adults and those with co-morbidities are at greater risk of severe illness or death from a COVID infection.

Care professionals are the heart of aging services, and throughout the pandemic they have demonstrated their dedication, commitment and bravery in the face of unprecedented, challenging circumstances. The COVID crisis exacerbated long-standing workforce challenges, and some in the sector fear that a vaccine mandate could lead to worker resignations. But providers that have required staff vaccinations have reported high vaccine acceptance by previously hesitant care professionals, and many providers report that when staff vaccination rates are high, they become providers of choice in their communities.

LeadingAge has signed on to a joint statement with the American Medical Association, American Nursing Association, American Pharmaceutical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Public Health Association, Association of American Medical Colleges, Council of Medical Specialty Societies, Infectious Disease Society of America, National Hispanic Medical Association, Society of Hospital Medicine, and others.