



January 5, 2021

Dear Members of Congress:

LeadingAge and the Visiting Nurse Associations of America congratulate members of the 117th Congress as you begin one of the most challenging legislative years in history. The country is confronting significant hardship in the face of the ongoing pandemic, with businesses closing and high rates of unemployment.

LeadingAge represents more than 5,000 nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-minded organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Our membership encompasses the entire continuum of aging and disability services. We bring together the most inventive minds in aging services to make America a better place to grow old.

Right now, older adults and the providers who care for them are at the center of the pandemic storm. Eighty percent of all COVID-19 deaths are among people 65+—a death rate at least 90 times higher than for 18-29 year-olds. Individuals living in congregate residential settings are at particularly high risk because the virus is easily transmitted in close quarters.

We ask for your support on key legislative actions that will preserve the nation's system of aging and long-term care services, including nursing homes, assisted living communities, life plan communities (also known as continuing care retirement communities), low-income senior housing, and home and community-based services (HCBS), which includes adult day, PACE, home care, home health, and hospice care. Many of these providers are struggling to stay open in the pandemic. If they shutter, what will happen to the vulnerable older adults they serve or those who will need their services in the future?

Your actions in the coming months can preserve the country's aging services system. We look forward to working with you on legislative proposals that will ensure aging services providers have the vaccines, testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), workforce, and financial resources they desperately need to continue providing the high-quality services and supports they are committed to delivering.

Specifically, we request your support for legislation that addresses the following critical needs:

- **Vaccines.** Continuing to support a fully federally funded, coordinated initiative to deliver vaccines to all recipients and providers of aging and long-term care services and supports across the continuum (residential and non-residential settings).
- **Testing.** We seek a fully funded, coordinated national testing program that covers all recipients (regardless of where they live) and providers of aging services. The program should include provisions for testing supplies, PPE, and staff time for testing, record-keeping and reporting.
- **Personal Protective Equipment.** There are still shortages of certain PPE items, and the cost of PPE is far beyond anticipated budgets. We ask Congress to ensure that manufacturing keeps up with the need; that PPE in the national and state stockpiles is distributed; and that costs of PPE are covered.

- **Workforce.** Already critical workforce shortages in aging services have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Workers on the front line are exhausted. We seek targeted funds to increase worker wages for frontline staff in nursing homes and assisted living communities, personal care aides, LPNs, and RNs.
- **Low-Income Senior Housing.** More than 1.6 million older adults live in federally subsidized apartment buildings. The need for funding for services, staffing, cleaning and disinfecting, service coordination, and wireless internet access far surpass relief provided thus far.
- **Financing.** Providers are facing costs beyond all expectations for supplies, temporary staff, infrastructure, and other necessary expenses to fight the pandemic. Medicare and Medicaid rates must be adjusted to take pandemic expenses into account. In addition, we ask you to support loan and grant programs, such as more Provider Relief Funds and expanded access to Paycheck Protection Program loans for not for profit aging services providers—with requirements for transparency in administration.
- **Additional Funds for States.** We request additional funding for states with requirements that they spend a set percentage on aging services, including preserving now-shuttered adult day and other HCBS programs. We also support efforts to increase the federal share of Medicaid costs, particularly for Medicaid HCBS.
- **Continuation of Public Health Emergency Waivers.** Many of the flexibilities allowed under 1135 waivers, particularly the waiver of the three day stay and many telehealth provisions, should be made permanent.

The arrival of vaccines and government support to quickly immunize older people and the providers who serve them holds inestimable promise that we will see the end of the pandemic. But the country's aging services system will need resources and policy changes to provide the dependable, high-quality, and robust care that is necessary as the population continues to age, and as the availability of family caregivers continues to decline.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these and other proposals to fortify aging services. Please contact Ruth Katz, LeadingAge's senior vice president for policy (rkatz@leadingage.org), with questions or to set up a meeting.

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