



A Preventable & Slow-motion Tragedy: **Backgrounder on COVID-19, Older Adults, Care Providers & Nursing Homes** (6/3/20)

As the federal government releases data on COVID-19 nursing home deaths, LeadingAge is helping to capture the full dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis—and how **the steps federal and state policymakers take next could determine the health and safety of millions of vulnerable older Americans.**

This backgrounder provides information on how care providers are working to protect millions of older adults from the worst pandemic in a century, while also putting their own lives at risk.

What's Needed to Prevent Nursing Home Deaths

In the coming months, the most important numbers of all will be the lives we save and the infections we prevent.

Nursing home providers know what it takes to keep infections out. But without federal and state government leadership, coordination and funds—all of which have been severely lacking since the beginning of the pandemic—nursing homes are being set up to fail our residents and the dedicated people who care for them.

Indeed, reckless reopenings could trigger a new surge of infections among highly vulnerable older adults.

LeadingAge has outlined Five Essential Actions to save our seniors:

- Immediate access to **ample and appropriate PPE** for all providers who serve older Americans.
- On demand and fully funded access to **accurate and rapid-results testing** for older adults and their care providers.
- Assurance that states will **consider the health and safety of older Americans as they reopen.**
- **Funding and support for aging services providers** across the continuum of care—in nursing homes, assisted living, affordable housing, hospice, or wherever they call home.
- Recognition **for the heroic frontline workers** who are risking their own lives serving older people during this crisis.
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[Americans agree:](#) 63% of registered voters wanted nursing homes and assisted living facilities to receive more funding from the government—and 72% say that insufficient government support has had a negative impact on care quality in nursing homes.

Nursing Homes: The People and Places Protecting Older Americans

Who Lives in Nursing Homes?

- 1.5 million people live in America's 15,000 certified nursing homes. ([LeadingAge Nursing Home market Snapshot](#))
- The average resident is over 80 years old. Two-thirds are women. ([LeadingAge Nursing Home market Snapshot](#))
- Nearly half have dementia, and nearly a third have a psychological diagnosis. ([Kaiser Family Foundation](#)). This makes coping with COVID-19 even more difficult, given the challenges of explaining and administering social distancing, testing, mask-wearing, etc.

Nursing Homes' Role in the Public Health System

- Skilled nursing home facilities (SNFs) provide:
 - 24/7 care in a residential setting including:
 - meal preparation and help with activities of daily living such as eating, bathing, managing medications, and going to the toilet;
 - physical therapy and recreational activities.
 - Rehabilitation services for patients transitioning from hospitals, home health and/or hospice. (Nursing homes are partners to other healthcare providers).
 - Some provide specialized care for people living with Alzheimer's and other dementias
- The continuum of aging service providers includes (ordered from most frequently used to least): assisted living communities, skilled nursing homes, home health providers, senior centers, hospices, adult day care services, life plan communities and Medicare/Medicaid PACE (Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly) programs.

Nonprofit Nursing Homes

- Approximately 24% of nursing homes are nonprofit (3,666), and nearly 70% are for-profit (10,811). The rest are government-owned (including state, county, city, hospital district, and federal government.) ([LeadingAge Nursing Home Market Snapshot](#))
- Nonprofit providers deliver higher quality of care on a variety of indicators, compared to their for-profit counterparts. They have 15% higher staffing ratios, meaning hours of staff on duty per resident, on average. ([Wall Street Journal analysis](#))
- As mission-driven organizations governed by boards of community members and local leaders, nonprofit nursing homes reinvest their profits into their organizations and community initiatives around issues affecting older Americans. These include elder abuse, elder isolation, LGBT aging, and intergenerational understanding.

Nursing Home Staffing

- Nursing homes have quickly growing staffing needs. Our nation will need an additional 2.5 million long-term services and support workers in all nursing homes by 2030 to keep up with the growth of America's aging population.
- Projected increases in various home positions between 2010 and 2030: 73% for registered nurses, 70% for licensed practical nurses, 68% for nursing assistance, and 67% for food preparation and serving workers ([LeadingAge Workforce Crisis Fact Sheet](#))

Costs for Nursing Home Care

- The average national costs of nursing home care is between \$225-\$253 a day or \$6,844-\$7,696 per month. ([LeadingAge Nursing Home Market Snapshot](#))
- The average annual cost of a private room at a nursing home is \$100,375 (\$89,297 for a semi-private room). ([LeadingAge Nursing Home Market Snapshot](#))
- Medicaid reimbursement is the source of more than 60% of nursing home funding annually.
- Most states do not cover the actual cost of nursing home care; underpayment for services can reach as high as \$23,000 per nursing home resident per year. ([LeadingAge Nursing Home Closures report; Kaiser Family Foundation; MacPac](#))

COVID-19's Threat to Older Adults and Care Providers

- Since the outset of this pandemic it's been clear that older adults and care workers are at the greatest risk.
- It is clear that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate effect on people who reside or work in long term care facilities, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.
 - An estimated 35-40% of Americans who have died lived in nursing homes.
 - The New York Times reports that more than half of all deaths from the virus in 14 states, the number of residents and workers who have died accounts for.

COVID-19 Testing in Nursing Homes

- Coronavirus testing is in its infancy. Even the most accurate tests produce high rates of false negatives, and results can be delayed a week or more.
- One test is a snapshot in time. No one knows what frequency of testing would mitigate spread of infection.
- Testing costs money. Each test costs \$100-\$200. Insurance plans typically cover one test. One-time testing of all staff and residents at nursing homes communities will cost an estimated \$440 million nationwide ([AHCA](#)).

About LeadingAge

We represent more than 5,000 aging-focused organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members and 38 state partners, we address critical issues by blending applied research, advocacy, education, and community-building. We bring together the most inventive minds in our field to support older adults as they age wherever they call home. We make America a better place to grow old. For more information: www.leadingage.org

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