



March 11, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are writing today to urge you to end the pause on external communications from federal health agencies. This ban on communications is disruptive, obstructive, and contradictory to the Secretary's commitment to "radical transparency". The directive must be rescinded immediately, and federal agencies must be permitted to resume communication with the public they serve.

Put into place by Acting Secretary Dorothy Fink on January 21, 2025, the pause was meant to end on February 1. However, external communications continue to be prohibited at this time, save a small handful of communications approved on a case-by-case basis. While the pause was intended to give the incoming Administration the opportunity to review and approve any regulations, guidance documents, and other public documents and communications, including social media, the enduring pause erodes public trust and hinders healthcare workers' and public servants' abilities to do their jobs.

The pause on external communications from federal health agencies has impacted the people working in and relying upon the long-term care sector in the following ways:

Collaboration. Communication between federal health agencies and long-term care providers is a two-way street. We work together toward our common goal of quality care for our nation's older adults. Canceling the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) annual Quality Conference and prohibiting communications such as meetings between CMS and LeadingAge means that CMS is unable to gather feedback on the real-life implications of agency policies, while LeadingAge and other associations and advocacy groups are unable to share insights into where providers are struggling and what additional support is needed to ensure compliance.

Technical Assistance. Long-term care providers look to our federal health agencies' expertise for proper implementation of regulatory actions. By prohibiting Open Door Forums, Partnership calls, and "Help Desk" services, CMS and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) are unable to provide clarification on the regulations that hold our sector accountable and the recommendations that keep us safe. They are unable to ensure regulations and guidance are operationalized based upon the evidence as intended. Providers' requests for help are met with the response, "We are unable to share information at this time."

Public Input. Population health is everyone's business. Postponing public meetings of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) prevents the public from learning about and providing practical input on public health concerns. When it comes to COVID, flu, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), our nation's older

adults and the people who care for them have the right to observe and weigh in on the processes that determine how we are immunized against infection, how we are managed during outbreak, and when healthcare workers return to work following infection.

Public Information. Our federal health agencies rely on data to tell the story of current conditions and drive decision-making in public health and long-term care. Interfering with the display of public information such as updates to CMS's Care Compare website and CDC's respiratory virus dashboards confuses and disadvantages the public by preventing the sharing of up-to-date information about conditions in our communities and healthcare settings. This interference further endangers our communities when our healthcare settings are unable to access the public health data they need for appropriate infection prevention and emergency preparedness.

We urge you, Secretary Kennedy, to immediately reinstate communications from federal health agencies to pre-Administration levels to ensure our healthcare settings can provide optimal care to the individuals they serve.

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

Cc: Heather Flick Melanson, Chief of Staff
Stephanie Carlton, Acting Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Susan Monarez, Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

About LeadingAge: We represent more than 5,400 nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-driven organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members and 36 partners in 41 states, we use applied research, advocacy, education, and community-building to make America a better place to grow old. Our membership encompasses the continuum of services for people as they age, including those with disabilities. We bring together the most inventive minds in the field to lead and innovate solutions that support older adults wherever they call home. For more information, visit [leadingage.org](https://www.leadingage.org).