



April 22, 2021

Liz Richter  
Acting Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
395 E Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Acting Administrator Richter and Director Walensky:

As we have stated previously in a [letter](#) dated February 24, 2021, COVID-19 vaccines are the most significant development of the pandemic. We are once again writing to urge that it is time for guidance on nursing home visitation, activities, and dining policies to catch up. We urge federal leadership to take immediate action to empower older adults to make their own decisions about how they wish to be protected during this pandemic.

We agree with the Long-Term Care Workgroup of the Empire State Bioethics Consortium in a recent [essay](#) posted on The Hastings Center website that concludes so eloquently:

We suggest that regulators, the media, and our bioethics colleagues also focus on *life* in nursing homes. The continued isolation of residents is a public health emergency that policymakers should address with passion and vigor. Prioritizing nursing home residents for vaccinations reflects the high value we as a society place on protecting life. Most nursing home residents have an anticipated limited lifespan. Let us promote a high quality of life for those that live in nursing homes by opening the doors to visitors and resuming socialization in a comprehensive and thoughtful manner. We all know that no virtual visit can replace a warm hug.


As the vaccination rates of nursing home residents and staff have increased dramatically and as states and the federal government begin to relax restrictions on businesses and in public places, this must also occur in long-term care communities.

We are also aware of the efforts of a Delphi group of clinical experts with their ongoing dialogue and recommendations to CMS and CDC surrounding vaccinations and visitation issues in long-term care settings. We support many of the data-driven recommendations they are discussing and look forward to reviewing their evolving work.

Older adults in long-term care communities should have the same rights to choose how to live their lives as those in the broader community. The CDC has issued guidance for vaccinated people for safe visitation and socialization. The same should be done for nursing home residents and those in other senior living environments; we have the data to safely adjust visitation guidance in a way that protects older adults from both the coronavirus pandemic and social isolation. We look forward to any upcoming revisions and are here to partner in helping make any modifications that increase older adults' autonomy and choices.

Please contact Ruth Katz ([rkatz@leadingage.org](mailto:rkatz@leadingage.org)), senior vice president for policy and advocacy, for additional information or to discuss these issues.

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