



March 9, 2020

Open Letter to All LeadingAge Washington Members:

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to every person who has worked tirelessly over the past two weeks as you've grappled with the rapid spread and uncertainties of the coronavirus. This new virus comes at a time when you are also well used to dealing with influenza and other expected seasonal illnesses. However, the added strains of coronavirus have disrupted the usual course of care delivery to hundreds of residents within your own organizations, to the community, as well as to the health care system at large.

It must be said, even though today's media coverage often overlooks this fact, you and your teams and the business partners you rely on for services are well-prepared for influenza and even norovirus. Indeed, infection control measures are well understood and implemented routinely and nearly flawlessly by your teams from housekeeping, maintenance, dietary, and your frontline caregivers and licensed nursing staff.

However, our response to the coronavirus has been complicated by public fears and delays in and changing state and federal guidance as well as the virus itself, including understanding how quickly and by what means it is transmitted from person to person. We are facing unprecedented systemic complexities that are challenging the health care system across the country with hospitals and long term care providers facing shortages of staff and supplies.

Here in Washington State in particular, health care organizations are facing a rapidly dwindling supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer and other supplies. This makes it quite difficult to protect staff against exposure to coronavirus. Not surprisingly, staff have become ill with either influenza or, in some cases, coronavirus. This leaves colleagues to carry double shifts and otherwise work short-staffed. Management has contacted outside nursing agencies to bring in staff to fill schedule holes but agencies have limited-to-no staff available to cover our needs, as well as those of other long term care settings and hospitals. Out of state licensed nurses may enter the state using an expedited temporary practice permit which hopefully will reduce the wait time to work from 14 to 1-3 days. But even this does not offer a sustainable, long term solution as other states need their frontline health care professionals to address their own coronavirus outbreaks that have spread across the country.

I hear countless stories of your creativity in searching for and securing thermometers when vast supplies have left the shelves of even Costco and local pharmacies. You've improvised using plastic bags as gowns. You've designed visitor screening protocols to limit exposure of both staff and residents. New admissions from hospitals have been delayed or in some cases refused due to lack of PPE or the ability to meet the health care needs of residents caused by short staff or lack of needed tests, for example, because mobile labs are no longer able to service the needs of residents at your communities. And while you have nurses that can, for example, perform blood draws, they do not have necessary equipment to do so, and mobile labs don't have couriers to send the testing supplies. Confirmed or suspected residents with coronavirus are isolated. You've done your best to limit healthy, non-

symptomatic, residents from coming into contact with other similarly healthy, non-symptomatic residents, also known as social distancing. Yet the fact is, maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet is a practical impossibility. Residents navigate hallways and move freely throughout the facility, they take meals in the dining room, they engage in various activities and maintaining connection with family and friends is vital to their quality of life and mental and psychosocial health. While we can take some precautionary measures to limit exposure, some restrictions are simply undoable.

Each of you have maintained a sense of calm and dedication to do what must be done to care for those within your communities and prevent the spread of coronavirus and to treat those with confirmed cases. You've acted responsibly to protect staff, residents, resident family members, business partners and visitors. Some have temporarily suspended adult day services but continue to provide health care by mobilizing caregivers to treat at home rather than a congregate settings. You've suspended public outings and activities, you've found new ways to continue providing meals to elderly and vulnerable persons. Affordable housing and senior living organizations are also going above and beyond their normal scope of services to coordinate healthcare and social needs for residents with little to no staff. You've done this during an unprecedented novel coronavirus outbreak, where Washington State first stood in its path.

It's been hard. You've done your jobs well. But our fight is far from over. Now is the time for all of us to pull together to protect the most vulnerable and to provide support and guidance. We need a standardized, coordinated and comprehensive plan to provide needed equipment, supplies and staff. While LeadingAge Washington is and will continue doing all it can to support our members, we can't do it without our federal, state and local partners, including the CDC, the Washington State Department of Health, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, hospitals in our state and the department of social and health services .

We need a system in which there is a single point of command with authority to cross agency lines and dedicate resources where and when needed. Ideally, central command would coordinate and effectively implement requisition and supply fulfillment; mobile clinic deployment; nurses that can cross state lines in a coordinated, documented fashion; and avoid heaping citations and punishment upon providers at a time when staff is doing its demonstrable, obvious best but limited by outside factors.

Much is being done to support you here at LeadingAge Washington. Staff have worked to understand the scope of your needs and break through barriers and get to the right point of contact who can make things happen – requisition supplies, maintain lab and x-ray coverage and find staff. We continue to stand ready to assist in any way possible. Laura Hofmann has done phenomenal work on your behalf since late January raising awareness and doing her best to prepare you for coronavirus. She and we are here for you, as is your national partner, LeadingAge. Let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,



Deb Murphy
President/Chief Executive Officer