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### **LeadingAge Washington Urges Senior Care Organizations to Adopt a Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccine Policy for All Employees**

LeadingAge Washington urges all senior living and care communities to adopt a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy for all employees as essential workers serving high risk individuals. Vaccination is currently the single most safe and effective method of preventing virus transmission and avoiding serious illness and death for the vast majority of individuals. Exceptions to vaccination of long term care employees must be permitted when vaccination is medically contraindicated or contrary to religious beliefs.

Vaccination of essential long term care workers is critically important given the age and medical condition of those receiving these care and services. Age, serious underlying medical conditions, and living in a congregate setting are critical factors placing the elderly at a heightened risk of serious illness and death should they contract the virus.

It is also important that essential long term care workers maintain their own health and well-being to ensure continuity in coverage of their responsibilities and duties of care to seniors. Particularly now, as we face a seemingly unprecedented nationwide shortage of workers caused by a multitude of factors all of which are beyond the control of senior care organizations.

The US Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have acknowledged that employers may require employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, even under Emergency Use Authorization. A number of courts have ruled similarly.

Therefore, to protect those at highest risk of serious illness, including death, and to better ensure continuity of care within long term care, LeadingAge Washington urges all senior care organizations to adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for all essential workers, unless medical or religious grounds exist for an exception.

In urging senior care organizations to adopt a policy requiring vaccination of all employees, each organization must carefully balance such a policy against other important considerations and take those steps necessary to achieve the greatest standard of safety and protection to all who work in and are cared for within their setting.

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*LeadingAge Washington is a statewide professional association representing mission forward senior living and care organizations throughout the state of Washington.*