



January 20, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

As your Administration begins to tackle the immense challenges of COVID-19, it is imperative that protecting older Americans and those who care for them be a top priority. As you know, this population is among the most vulnerable to the harmful effects of the virus, with nearly 80 percent of all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. having occurred in people over the age of 65, and for older adults living in senior living communities—whose average age is 85, the risk is even higher. Argentum, the leading national association representing senior living communities, urges your Administration to immediately prioritize these senior congregate settings for COVID-19 vaccines. We ask that adequate supplies are held in reserve for the critical second dose of the vaccine intended to be administered 21-28 days following the initial dose to achieve the maximum efficacy of the vaccine.

Argentum is a national, non-profit association representing over 70 percent of professionally managed senior living communities. Our member companies offer the entire spectrum of seniors housing—independent living, assisted living, memory care, and continuing care services. For nearly a year, our member operators and their senior living staff have been serving on the front lines of this pandemic, working tirelessly and compassionately to keep safe and engaged the two million residents who call senior living home and almost one million employees who care for them.

We were pleased that the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended residents and staff of long-term care facilities for Phase 1a priority for vaccine administration. However, many communities have reported logistical challenges in receiving the vaccine, or that not all residents and staff will receive the vaccine in this initial wave, particularly those who are in an independent living setting. Further, some states are moving onto other orders of priority, bypassing senior congregate settings that are now not expected to receive vaccines for weeks, well after those who are lower on vaccine prioritization. It is critical that these seniors and their caregivers remain a top priority, as residents have high levels of chronic illness, functional impairment, and healthcare utilization, reflecting an increased risk of serious illness and death if infected with COVID-19.

The CDC's estimate for vaccine distribution included 21 million individuals identified as healthcare personnel (including long-term care facilities), as well as 3 million long-term care facility residents, which included 1.3 million in skilled nursing, 800,000 in assisted living, and 900,000 in other residential care facilities. An estimated 400,000 older Americans reside in independent living facilities, and while we recognize that vaccine supply is initially limited, we believe it is imperative that for both logistical efficiency and efficacy, the vaccine be administered to all residents and staff within a community at the same time as we believe to be the original intent of the CDC's recommendations for senior congregate settings.

Separately, we urge your Administration to address the immediate need for financial relief and to speed processing of payments from the Provider Relief Fund. Nearly a year into this pandemic, many assisted living providers are still waiting for financial relief. We are increasingly concerned that as their financial resources are exhausted, communities will have no other choice than to close their



doors and force these vulnerable seniors from their homes and caregivers. Based on an internal survey of our members:

- Of those that have received relief, **50% reported that it was less than 1% of their losses incurred in 2020.**
- Nearly 75% of respondents said their **expenses related to COVID-19 have increased significantly.**
- Half reported that **closures were imminent** within the next year if more relief is not received, a 20% increase from October 2020.

Senior living communities currently estimate COVID-related expenses to total \$11-15 billion as a result of costs related to PPE, testing, hero pay, and infection prevention and control resources for residents and staff. This is in addition to compounding losses, which have already reached \$15 billion. Unlike other providers, whose losses were felt in the earlier days of this pandemic (due to loss of elective procedures), the senior living industry is suffering our most significant losses now and these losses will only be compounded in the future. This is due to the sharp decline in occupancy rates. Many providers are reporting declines in admissions of 75% compared to the same period in 2019.

From the outset of the pandemic, senior living communities have not received the same levels of support and assistance in the COVID-19 response as nursing homes. This has led to a lack of prioritization for seniors and caregivers in these communities, both in the payments made available from the Provider Relief Fund, and in the prioritization of skilled nursing above assisted living (and now also independent living) for vaccine distribution. We strongly believe that all vulnerable older adults and the frontline workers in senior congregate care should have equitable support to care for those most vulnerable, and to prevent the spread of the virus and additional loss of life.

We appreciate your attention to the critical needs of seniors during this unprecedented time. The financial struggles of assisted living facilities due to the lengthy delays in relief are now dire, and vaccines are desperately needed for residents and staff in all senior congregate settings as recommended by the CDC. The caregivers in our member communities are doing their utmost to care for and protect our nation's most vulnerable population from this terrible virus; access to vaccines for long-term care and senior living residents and staff will help guard against the threat of COVID-19 and allow senior living communities the ability to better serve this most vulnerable population, and the caregivers who remain on the frontlines.

Any assistance that your Administration can provide in expediting support including financial relief and priority vaccine distribution would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about the urgent needs of our member communities, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jbalda@argentum.org](mailto:jbalda@argentum.org).

Sincerely,

James Balda  
President & CEO  
Argentum