



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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April 15, 2020

Ms. Tara Gregorio, President
Massachusetts Senior Care Association
800 South Street
Suite 280
Waltham, MA 02453

Dear Tara:

As the Commonwealth continues to adapt and respond to the unprecedented COVID-19 public health pandemic, the Baker-Polito administration, through its COVID-19 Command Response Center and our sister agencies, have been focused on stabilizing and supporting the long-term care industry, including nursing homes. Our shared commitment is to ensure nursing home residents and staff are safe during this outbreak. I am grateful for your ongoing support, advocacy and collaboration.

Nursing homes are on the front lines and one of the highly vulnerable settings for outbreaks of COVID-19, due to the age and underlying health conditions of residents, and because they rely on health care staff and other workers who come and go into the facility. It is for this very reason that the Commonwealth was among the first states to take affirmative action to protect nursing home residents by instituting nursing home visitation restrictions, issuing guidance for long term care facilities, and implementing screening guidelines for all long-term care facility staff. We continue to take an aggressive and proactive approach to support nursing homes through this emergency.

The Commonwealth's multipronged strategy to support nursing home residents and staff includes:

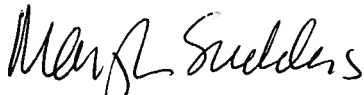
- **Expanding testing capacity** through the Commonwealth's Mobile Testing program, which has already visited 264 facilities, directly tested more than 4,500 people, and on-site testing capability that to date has provided 8,600 test kits to 77 facilities for medical staff to test residents and workers. Testing can be offered for all residents and staff.

- **Distributing significant personal protective equipment (PPE) to nursing homes**, including 169,000 N95/KN95 masks, 270,000 surgical masks, 43,000 gowns, and 250,000 gloves to date; **nursing homes have received more masks than any other facility type, including hospitals.**
- **Supporting staff and increasing staffing capacity** by contracting with “rapid response clinical teams” that provide short-term stabilization to facilities with immediate staffing needs and standing up a long-term care hiring portal to match applicants with long term care facilities. The Commonwealth will provide a \$1000 bonus for individuals who apply through the portal and become employed at a nursing facility for a set number of hours.
- **Deploying crisis management support to nursing homes** that require on-site management and technical assistance regarding staffing, infection control measures, or other operational issues related to COVID-19.
- **Committing \$130 million funding package** to support staffing salaries, additional staffing, infection control, and supply costs. Part of this funding includes a 10% across the board rate increase for all nursing home facilities retroactive to April 1st.
- **Launching the Nursing Home Family Resource Line** to connect family members of nursing and rest home residents and assisted living residences with the information and resources they need.

Additionally, we have committed to a 10% across the board rate increase for rest homes for the same period as nursing facilities.

Attached please find a fact sheet that provides additional details on the Commonwealth’s efforts to stabilize and support the nursing home industry through the COVID-19 pandemic. In closing, I am deeply appreciative to the staff who come to work to support the needs of our nursing home residents. I look forward to continuing to work with you and my colleagues at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services as we stabilize and support the needs of our residents, staff and management of our long-term care facilities. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Marylou Sudders

CC: Daniel Tsai, Deputy Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Lauren Peters, Undersecretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Elizabeth Chen, Secretary of Elder Affairs
Monica Bharel, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health



Supporting Nursing Homes During COVID-19

April 15, 2020

The Baker-Polito Administration supports the nursing home industry in response to the unique challenges of the COVID-19 public health pandemic in meeting the needs of their residents and supporting their staff.

- Massachusetts is working with long-term care facilities to detect, mitigate and manage their outbreaks of COVID-19 while ensuring residents are receiving the care they need during the public health emergency. For the more than 50,000 Massachusetts residents that live in a long-term care facility, COVID-19 presents a serious risk. That is why **Massachusetts was among the first states to implement stringent visitation restrictions, create guidance for long-term care facilities including screening guidelines for all staff, and commit to rate increases.**

While the outbreak continues to rapidly evolve, the Baker-Polito Administration has taken aggressive steps to support long term care facilities. This multipronged strategy includes **six key initiatives.**

Expanding testing capacity for long term care facilities.

- Created the Mobile Testing Program as a partnership between the MA National Guard, DPH and the Broad Institute. The program has improved access to testing for nursing home, rest home, and assisted living facilities and added to our visibility of how the virus is impacting these facilities. The program has expanded to include testing of all residents and staff upon request.
- Facilities may also conduct on-site testing using their own nursing home medical staff with testing kits supplied by the Broad Institute.
- **As of April 14th, the MA National Guard tested more than 4,500 individuals at 264 facilities. Over 8,600 test kits to 77 facilities for onsite testing have been distributed.**

Distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) to nursing homes

- Since the beginning of March, the Commonwealth has distributed 169,000 N95/KN95 masks, 270,000 surgical masks, 43,000 gowns, and 250,000 gloves to nursing homes and senior living facilities.
- **Nursing facilities have received more masks than any other facility type, including hospitals.**

Supporting staffing and increasing staffing capacity

- Massachusetts has contracted with “rapid response clinical teams”, comprised of clinicians including RNs, CNAs, and EMS technicians, that can provide short-term staffing to facilities with immediate needs.
- Massachusetts has created a long-term care hiring portal to match applicants with facilities, offering a signing bonus to all individuals who register through the portal and work at a nursing facility for a specific amount of time.
- Massachusetts created a volunteer portal and leverages the MA Responds volunteer portal to recruit staff for long term care facilities.

Deploying crisis management support to specific nursing homes

- Massachusetts has contracted with a firm that specializes in nursing home crisis management to provide facilities with on-site operational assistance to help with staffing, vendors, implementing infection control measures, creating COVID-19 wings/units and other related issues.
- At any given time, these specialists can be deployed to multiple facilities.

Committing \$130 million in funding.

- **\$50 million** in MassHealth supplemental payments to nursing facilities as part of the provider financial stabilization package announced in early April. Payments will be made monthly from April to July. This represents a 10% across the board rate increase.
- **\$50 million** through an additional 15% MassHealth rate increase for nursing homes that stand up COVID-19 isolation wings in their facilities
- **\$30 million** to stand up dedicated COVID-19 skilled nursing facilities.

Launching the Nursing Home Family Resource Line

- The Nursing Home Family Resource Line is a dedicated phone line to connect family members of nursing home and rest home residents and assisted living residences with the information and resources they need. **The Nursing Home Family Resource Line is staffed from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, seven days a week at 617-660-5399.** It has handled over 1,000 as of April 14.

Finally, the Commonwealth has also committed to a 10% rate increase for rest homes.

The Command Center continues to closely monitor the situation within long term care facilities during the public health emergency and will update guidance and supports as appropriate.