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## Feds Extend COVID-19 Vaccine Program Sign-up Deadline

In Breaking News today, the HHS announced that the deadline for the COVID-19 vaccine program has been extended from Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup> out to Friday, November 6<sup>th</sup>. This will likely help many health services get the assistance they need without as much fear of missing the original deadline.

Written by: Lois A. Bowers

10/27/2020

Senior living and other long-term care providers [now have until Nov. 6](#) to sign up for the Partnership for Long-Term Care Program, according to the American Health Care Association / National Center for Assisted Living.

The organizations relayed the new deadline Tuesday. The deadline had been this Friday, Oct. 30.

The federal program, [announced Oct. 16](#) by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense, will enable long-term care residents and staff members to be vaccinated against COVID-19 free of charge to them when a vaccine becomes available. As of Friday, [more than 9,000 long-term care providers](#) had signed up for the program, according to HHS.

Assisted living communities, independent living communities, continuing care retirement communities (also known as life plan communities), residential care homes, adult family homes, skilled nursing facilities and nursing homes are eligible.

HHS said that senior living operators who wish to participate should complete [this form](#).

*Skilled nursing and other types of long-term care facilities certified by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services that report data through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Healthcare Safety Network should [log in to NHSN](#) and look for the link to the program under "alerts," according to HHS.*



The Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program, which is in cooperation with CVS Health and Walgreens, is voluntary; operators may choose to use their current pharmacy contracts for their COVID-19 vaccination efforts.



## 'Real' COVID Relief Package Must Include Assisted Living, Affordable Housing: LeadingAge

**Katie Smith Sloan, President and CEO of LeadingAge, is using her voice to fight for recognition in the senior living space in D.C. as Congress mulls over the options for COVID relief funding. LeadingAge also features new resources that help you make sense of the latest news and events as they relate to relief.**

Written by: Kimberly Bonvissuto

10/23/2020

Following Senate Democrats' vote on Wednesday to block a Republican \$500 billion coronavirus stimulus proposal, LeadingAge is calling for Congress to quickly provide "real relief" for older adults and their caregivers that includes not just nursing homes, but also assisted living, affordable senior housing, home health and hospice.

"With COVID-19 skyrocketing in more than 40 states and flu season underway, time is running out for Congress to pass a real relief package to protect vulnerable older Americans who have suffered 80% of deaths — over 160,000 — for the worst pandemic in a century," LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan said.

Although Sloan said she is pleased that negotiations between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and U.S. Secretary of Treasury Steve Mnuchin are continuing, she added that a "real relief" package must address the whole continuum of aging services.

"The need to access and pay for critical resources, including personal protective equipment, testing, supplies and staffing, is unrelenting," she said. "Their COVID-19-related costs are staggering, and they are unsustainable. Some providers are shutting down, and more will follow — unless Congress steps up and provides robust support."

Sloan pointed to LeadingAge's ["Situation Report on COVID-19 and Aging Services,"](#) which amplified the senior living and care industry's call for ongoing access to rapid-results testing, PPE, staffing, infection control supplies and financial relief.

Sloan said it's "unconscionable" for Congress to even consider legislation that does not address the "escalating danger to older Americans and those who care for them."



“After yesterday’s [Wednesday’s] Senate vote, our leaders have a clear choice,” she said. “Will they deliver what older adults need, or will they go down in history as a body that walked away from a generation of Americans?”



## Mandating Seasonal Flu Vaccinations in the Workplace in the Time of COVID-19

**We know that this flu season will be unlike any other that we have faced as a nation, and keeping seniors healthy is a great responsibility. Senior living employers have many options to look at and they have to keep their staff healthy in order to serve those living in their communities.**

Written by: Patricia Goodson & James Bobbitt

10/26/2020

Many employers, particularly those in healthcare and related industries, previously have considered whether to require their employees to receive the seasonal flu vaccine. This year, there has been a renewed focus on this issue, as many fear that flu season will intensify the ongoing public health emergency caused by COVID-19. Additionally, the issue of mandatory vaccinations in the workplace is becoming increasingly relevant as medical experts in the U.S. anticipate that a COVID-19 vaccine will be available for distribution to the general public in soon. As a result, employers once again are contemplating whether to require their employees to receive the flu vaccine – and potentially a forthcoming COVID-19 vaccine – as a condition of employment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a [dedicated section on its website](#) concerning flu vaccine information for healthcare workers. Currently, the agency does not recommend that employers require employees to get the flu vaccine. Instead, it suggests that [employers encourage vaccination](#) through hosting on-site clinics and providing incentives to employees. Likewise, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission states that [employers should encourage vaccination](#) but avoid mandating it.

Nonetheless, healthcare employers have discretion to implement a mandatory flu vaccination policy for certain positions. Courts considering this issue consistently have determined that employers can require employees working with immunocompromised populations such as sick people, the elderly and young children to receive the seasonal flu vaccine. This requirement, however, is not absolute. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, employers may be prohibited from requiring employees who have a disability that prevents them from taking the flu vaccine to get the vaccine. Similarly, pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, employers may be prohibited from requiring employees whose sincerely held religious beliefs, practices or observances prevent them from taking the flu vaccine from getting the annual shot.

Under both the ADA and Title VII, covered employees can request a “reasonable accommodation” as an exception to an employer’s mandatory flu vaccination policy. For employers in the healthcare industry, providing a reasonable accommodation may mean reassigning employees so they no longer are in contact with medically

vulnerable populations. An employer is legally obligated to provide a reasonable accommodation unless it can show that the accommodation would impose an “undue hardship.”

A reasonable accommodation does not have to be an employee’s proposed or preferred accommodation. Employers, however, should engage in an interactive process with employees to determine whether an accommodation exists that works for everyone. Employers should seek legal counsel to discuss options and determine the extent of their obligations under the law.

To date, neither the CDC nor the EEOC have issued guidance regarding whether employers will be able to require employees to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Given that COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic and has significantly disrupted the U.S. economy, we anticipate that guidance will be issued in the coming months. In the meantime, guidelines related to mandating the flu vaccine may be instructive to forward-looking employers who already are considering the effects of a COVID-19 vaccine and how such a vaccine will impact their workforce and operations.

## SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

### 33% of Senior Housing Residents Are Unwilling to Be Tested for Covid-19

**The latest stats published by Activated Insights hold some potentially shocking information on the viewpoints of seniors in assisted living. The 5,000 surveyed individuals have shared their thoughts on reopening visitation, wearing masks and getting tested for COVID-19.**

Written by: Chuck Sudo

10/19/2020

A sizable cohort of senior housing residents and their families do not want to be tested for Covid-19, while an equal-sized segment is willing to be tested monthly.

Senior housing residents and their families also are overwhelmingly satisfied with the industry’s response to Covid-19, and want tighter community restrictions on visitors to remain in place for the foreseeable future, according to a survey conducted by Activated Insights, the senior care division of Great Place to Work, the organization that [puts together the annual Great Place to Work in Aging Services list](#). This year’s list is scheduled to be released on December 10.

Overall, 80% of senior housing residents and their families are satisfied with their community’s response to the pandemic – echoing results Activated Insights found over the summer, Activated Insights CEO Dr. Jacquelyn Kung told Senior Housing News. The survey included responses from 5,000 people.

The survey also revealed a vast majority – 80% – want communities to reopen and require all visitors to wear masks. However, less than 10% of residents want their communities to reopen without restrictions, and 6% don’t want their communities to reopen at all.

Perhaps the most surprising result of the survey found that one-third of respondents indicated an unwillingness to

be tested for the coronavirus, while another one-third indicated they are willing to be tested monthly. Nearly 10% were open to daily testing, and the remainder said they wanted to be tested bi-weekly.

The cohort that is unwilling to be tested for Covid-19 surprised Kung, and she suspects that part of the reason for the high percentage might be due to family members of memory care residents. They fill out the surveys if their loved one is not able to, and so the result could reflect their own feelings, or their attempt to discern what someone with cognitive impairment might prefer, Kung surmised.

But there are instances where that reluctance fades once providers get to the root issues behind it. In one example, HumanGood found no resistance to testing among its residents after launching its testing program with Dr. Chris Furmanski, former head of innovation at Stanford Health Care, over the summer, Kung told SHN.

Arcadia Communities, one provider whose residents participated in the survey, was also surprised by the high percentage of respondents who expressed a reticence for testing. The Louisville, Kentucky-based operator has a portfolio of seven communities in Kentucky and Tennessee. The organization saw 56% of residents and their families participate in the survey. Of that number, 93% of respondents strongly agreed with the operator's response to the pandemic, but 32% expressed an unwillingness to be tested, COO Kristie Kronk told SHN.

Arcadia leadership and executive directors reached out to respondents who did not want to be tested and learned that, because communities have been in lockdown since spring, a greater fear among resident populations was contracting the virus from frontline workers and their movements outside of the work environment.

"They wanted to be sure we were considering how often we were testing our staff," Kronk said.

Arcadia, which has not recorded a positive Covid-19 case among its residents, now conducts monthly baseline testing for staff and is quick to quarantine workers who test positive.

Kronk stressed that the rest of Arcadia's respondents are open to at least monthly testing.

These survey findings come as access to testing is improving, and as some senior living providers are pursuing innovative approaches to testing. The federal government has [sent](#) Covid-19 rapid antigen tests to thousands of assisted living communities across the country. These tests in some cases will supplement ongoing testing regimens that providers have already developed. Kisco Senior Living is pursuing a [pooled approach](#) to testing, utilizing saliva samples; residents are less resistant to saliva-based tests compared to uncomfortable nasopharyngeal swab tests, VP of Operations Ed Ward [told](#) SHN.

Other findings from the survey include that one out of every two residents and family members wants weekly communication on reopening plans, 10% want daily communication, and 45% prefer bi-weekly or monthly updates. As for preferred methods of communication, between 50% and 60% of respondents prefer letters or mail, and 40% prefer updates in community newsletters or mailbox stuffers.

At Arcadia, 54% of its respondents indicated they preferred updates via mail, and on a monthly basis, Kronk said.

Arcadia's updates include guidance on community restrictions and safety procedures, which she credits as being the foundation for Arcadia's successful response to the pandemic.

"We're putting together really good information," she said. "Our families have felt from day one that we have kept them well informed, and we have had their loved one as our highest priority."

 **SENIOR HOUSING NEWS**

## New Platforms, Consistent Messages: How 4 Providers Have Adapted Marketing in Covid-19

**Even without the challenges given with COVID it can be tough to fill occupancy at any given senior living community. Several communities – featured here – have been able to adapt to the current landscape with creative solutions and new technology norms.**

Written by: Tim Regan

10/22/2020

While many providers struggled at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain leads and move-ins, they have since pivoted to new strategies — mostly virtual — to overcome those hurdles.

Virtual tours and remote meetings — once a rarity in the senior living industry — are now commonplace. And providers including Sunrise Senior Living, Presbyterian Senior Living, Otterbein SeniorLife and Episcopal Retirement Services have coped by committing to them fully. The providers are also embracing transparency as a way to assuage fears and promote safety and security during the sales and marketing process.

### **Market shifts**

While the pandemic has transformed how providers sell and market their communities, the biggest change occurred in how providers are reaching their prospective customers.

It was as if a switch had flipped at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Kelly Myers, senior vice president of sales at McLean, Virginia-based Sunrise Senior Living. Although the preferences of residents and their loved ones didn't change as much with the pandemic, the process and tools for reaching them did.

“Our interactions with family members, and what we need to help them through, none of that has changed,” Myers said during a virtual panel at this year's Senior Care Marketing and Sales Summit, also known as SMASH Week. “What has changed are the platforms that we have to use in order to connect with people or to share information.”

Providers are also now dealing more often with adult children, who are helping their parents decide whether to move into senior housing and sometimes also caring for them in the interim.

All of the providers have made adjustments to their budgets, one way or another. For instance, while Cincinnati-based Episcopal Retirement Services is not cutting back on digital or traditional advertising, it is trying to become less reliant on outside support services.

Meanwhile, Lebanon, Ohio-based Otterbein is ramping up its marketing spending after slowing down earlier this year, and is looking for ways to more effectively reallocate those dollars for 2021.

Although Dillsburg, Pennsylvania-based Presbyterian was already on the trajectory of centralizing its marketing

spend, Covid-19 accelerated that process this year. And, Sunrise has been able to cut back on its travel expenses and deploy that money in more efficient ways in its marketing budgets.

### Technology and transparency

Using new technology and implementing new sales and marketing tools was a big challenge that required outside-the-box thinking, according to Bryan Reynolds, vice president of marketing and public relations at Episcopal Retirement Services.

When the organization shifted to using Zoom and other virtual conferencing technologies earlier this year, it also began coaching salespeople on how to maintain their presence and energy when remotely talking to residents or their families.

“My background is in television, and having that presence when you’re on camera — you have to be about four or five notches of energy above an in-person [meeting],” Reynolds said.

Episcopal also began using new tools to promote its communities, such as a podcast series with residents it launched in the spring, and a video series on wellness.

Otterbein encountered some challenges shifting to a tech-driven sales and marketing strategy. In particular, the company’s post-acute sales teams found it more difficult than before to engage with referral sources — a development that was “scary,” according to Shonia Russelle, associate vice president of marketing and communications at Otterbein.

“We were so used to having that foot traffic in the hospitals and being able to meet face-to-face with so many of our referral partners,” Russelle said. “A lot of that dried up immediately.”

Faced with new challenges, the company coped by maintaining its relationships with some of its closer partners. Otterbein began buying pizza for its partner’s staff members who were working long hours, or sending them care packages with vitamin C packets and bottled water. That came in handy later.

“Some of those strong relationships were the first ones that opened up ... virtual sessions with us,” Russelle said. “[We discussed topics such as], ‘What’s going on with Otterbein? What’s going on with the team?’ so that we could exchange information on how we can move forward together.”

The provider has also supported its sales staff by checking up on them periodically, or by encouraging them to take care of their needs to avoid the stress, fear and anxiety that comes with “Covid weariness.”

“We have to pull each other through this, because the goal is to ... get on the other side of the pandemic,” Russelle said. “We have to find a way to still execute our plans, reach our company goals, but also keep our team moving along.”

In addition to embracing new technologies such as Skype, Zoom and Facetime, providers also had to shift to communication and marketing policies [centered on transparency](#).

When the pandemic hit earlier this year, Presbyterian looked to become as transparent as it could with residents and their families. The overarching goal of that messaging is to convey how safe and secure residents are inside their communities, according to Kristin Hambleton, vice president of sales and marketing with Presbyterian Senior Living.

“One of the things that we put out there in the messaging is that our residents have never had to worry about whether or not they would run out of basic necessities,” Hambleton said. “And that was in every level of care.”

Similarly, Sunrise put in an “enormous amount of work” retraining its sales directors so that they could become knowledgeable on all of the company’s infection control policies and procedures.

“[We retrained them] to make sure that they could be transparent with our customers, and share with them not only what we’re doing, but why we’re doing it,” Myers said. “And if the competitor might be doing it a bit differently, to simply be able to back that up with why we feel so strongly about keeping our current residents safe.”