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## 540,000 COVID-19 Antigen Tests for Assisted Living Communities are 'In the Mail'

**Over half-million COVID-19 antigen tests are on the way specifically to assisted living communities, which will cover about 5,000 individual communities. The tests, should arrive in the next few weeks and give senior living operators a better idea of infection rates in their community.**

Written by: Kimberly Bonvissuto

9/21/2020

Approximately 540,000 COVID-19 antigen tests from Abbott Laboratories are "in the mail" and on their way to assisted living providers, according to LeadingAge.

Sept. 1, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [announced](#) that it had purchased 150 million BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card tests from Abbott with the intention of distributing the tests to states and congregate care facilities, including assisted living communities, in mid-September.

LeadingAge [reported](#) that, as of Sept. 17, approximately 540,000 of the tests had been shipped to assisted living operators with Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) waivers (about 5,400 facilities), and 1 million tests were shipped to skilled nursing facility operators, based on county COVID-19 prevalence rates. Home health providers will be included on a future distribution list.

HHS and Abbott [hosted a webinar](#) for assisted living communities on Friday to explain the manufacturer's [training](#), introduce the test and discuss its use in assisted living. The manufacturer demonstrated the training tools available and answered questions from providers.

The federal government has not published a distribution plan, but Abbott said it will continue to send replacement kits to facilities through December. Operators will not be able to order replacement kits until later this year or early next year, however, because HHS has purchased all of the Abbott kits manufactured.

According to LeadingAge, BinaxNOW tests are intended to be used in people in whom healthcare providers

suspect COVID-19 and should be given within the first seven days of symptom onset, but the tests can be used for surveillance testing, based on the [Food and Drug Administration's FAQs on testing for SARS-CoV-2](#). Follow-up molecular testing should be conducted in symptomatic individuals who test negative on the antigen tests.

Providers using the BinaxNOW test are required to notify public health officials of their intent to use the tests, report the results and ensure that staff members giving the tests are appropriately trained.

According to a representative from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the Friday webinar, LeadingAge said, operators should prioritize testing in people who have symptoms or are high-risk, as well as those who have been exposed to the disease. Testing of all previously negative residents and staff members should be performed every three to seven days until there are no positive cases in a community for 14 days.

Any provider receiving an invoice from Abbott [should not pay it](#), LeadingAge said. HHS is paying for the tests, and the invoices were a mistake.



## Reporting Requirements Tied to Federal COVID Aid Remain Uncertain for Assisted Living Operators

**With many senior living facilities waiting for Federal aid to be dispersed, there is a lot of uncertainty around the qualifications and any potential changes in oversight in operations. There are still many concerns about what rules and regulations should be put in place for the safety of senior residents.**

Written by: Lois A. Bowers

9/18/2020

Private-pay assisted living operators cheered when the Department of Health and Human Services announced that they could [apply for COVID-19-related aid](#) from the Provider Relief Fund. The announcement, however, already has at least one industry investor concerned.

Irvine, CA-based real estate investment trust Healthpeak Properties [said this week](#) that potential increased federal oversight of assisted living connected to the stimulus money is one reason the company is continuing to [consider a future](#) with a smaller senior housing portfolio. The REIT ultimately could exit the sector.

Nursing home funding amounts are [tied to COVID-19 infection and mortality rates](#) in residents, but it remains to be seen what data-reporting the federal government will ask of assisted living operators who receive the funding (the [revised deadline](#) to begin the application process is Monday).

All types of providers will be required to tell the Department of Health and Human Services how they spend their relief fund payments, according to [Morning Consult](#). An HHS spokesperson told the outlet that all providers

receiving funds also must comply with any reporting requirements “specified in future directions issued by the Secretary.”

R. Tamara Konetzka, Ph.D., a professor of health services research at the University of Chicago who [testified in May](#) before the Senate Special Committee on Aging, told the outlet that COVID-related data-reporting by assisted living operators “should be mandatory.”

It might be difficult for HHS to enforce nursing home-like data-reporting requirements for assisted living operators after funding is disbursed, however, Morning Consult notes.

The funding formula also is potentially problematic, according to another policy expert.

Eligible assisted living operators applying for the aid will receive an amount equal to 2% of their annual revenue from “patient care,” according to HHS.

Karyn Schwartz, a senior fellow at the Kaiser Family Foundation, said that a formula based on rate, not on need or virus severity, raises the possibility that relief may not be distributed fairly.



## COVID-19 Prompts Closer Look at Healthcare in Senior Living, Speakers Say

**Several prominent senior living advisors call for a push for more proactive care in the country’s senior living communities. The opportunities for technological and traditional care advancement are on the table and influencers have made a clear case for better models of care.**

Written by: Kimberly Bonvissuto

9/21/2020

The fear that COVID-19 has created about congregate living “is very real,” and the senior living industry must take steps to allay it, according to [Nexus Insights](#) founder and President [Bob Kramer](#).

“The whole senior housing and care space has to win back the trust and confidence of residents, potential residents and their families. It will cause a creative disruption of the paradigms of seniors housing and care,” Kramer said Thursday as part of a panel discussion about the future of collaborative care across the long-term care continuum in light of the pandemic. His remarks came at the LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies’ 15th annual Collaborative Care HIT Summit, which was held online this year due to the pandemic.

One of the major areas that the senior living industry will need to address — quickly — is healthcare, said the co-founder, former president and CEO, and current strategic adviser to the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care. Senior living and the home- and community-based services provided there must transform from a “reactive healthcare model,” he said.

“One of the biggest changes we’ve seen in consumer behavior in our field is, for the first time, there is a very real

fear of the hospital, the emergency room and the doctor's office," Kramer said. The current care model in seniorliving, he added, "is that we don't 'do' healthcare, and we ship out our residents for healthcare services. I don't think that model will survive going forward in the future."

Short of only offering independent living, the industry has a big opportunity to look at healthcare from a preventive point of view, Kramer said. Actively managing the chronic and underlying health conditions of residents will become a necessity and what communities will be judged on, he said. And if they fail, they will be held accountable.

"You will have to learn to do more — and do more triaging on-site so you don't use 911 and the emergency room as the overnight shift," Kramer said. "It opens huge opportunities in the area of technology. How will payers drive this, in terms of plan members living in these communities?"

The answer to that question, panelists said, is technology.

Panel member Andy McMahon, vice president of health and human services policy at United Healthcare Community & State, said he's seen a 28-time increase in the use of telehealth among recipients of long-term services and supports served by his company and a 105-time increase in the use of telehealth by customers in skilled nursing facilities and those with special needs.

Onyx Health CEO Susheel Ladwa, another panel member, said that healthcare, as an industry, historically has been late in adopting technology, prompted only by mandates. COVID-19, he said, has changed that approach.

"COVID is the key transformation officer for healthcare," Ladwa said. "What we're seeing is a mad rush to figure out what's new in the market, and how do we become an early adopter to preserve revenue streams. That motivation was nonexistent before."

Regarding older adults, he said, most older baby boomers are used to wired telephones, so the migration to social media and smaller mobile devices was difficult for many of them to make. The introduction of voice-based communication through Amazon Alexa and Google, Ladwa added, is viewed as an extension of something they are familiar with: the telephone.

"Voice-based communication is one of the most important ways seniors have always communicated through their life," he said. "It's a natural extension of the way we deliver care to seniors. They don't see it as a leap into something new, but a natural progression of voice from telephone to an assistant."

Ladwa called voice-based assistants "technology 1.0" from a senior care standpoint. "Technology 2.0," he said, will be voice plus video. Beyond that, he said, could be augmented reality or something new.

Kramer added that, if healthcare providers traditionally are late adopters of technology, then senior living is even further behind, and the challenge is even greater because the sector was "dragged almost kicking and screaming into the modern era of digital communication."

"We weren't there prior to March. Now, because of forced integration of senior care and healthcare, it's requiring senior care to catch up with healthcare, which is catching up with other industries in the use of digital and voice," Kramer said. "The whole field is ripe for major disruption and major change that benefits older adults."

Kramer said that whether in a senior living setting, other congregate living setting or in a traditional home, the use of predictive analytics combined with artificial intelligence will become essential.

"We're thinking from the point of view of prevention — either preventing people from having institutional-type

care, or preventing a trip to the hospital,” Kramer said. “That active management of chronic conditions requires data that is useful, informative and enables you to take preventive steps.”

Kramer said he hopes baby boomers, whose greatest fears are dementia and having to move into a nursing home, will see connections between lifestyle and what they need to do proactively for their health to be able to achieve their goals.

“Where they live matters, and what they do matters,” he said. “I do think this is the role of technology, and enabling boomers to self-direct and self-manage their own health and lifestyle, and get constant feedback that says, ‘If you want *this*, you’ll have to do *this*.’ Tie it into their goals.”

## SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

### Senior Living Tech Spending Skyrockets Amid Covid-19, With Questions About Future

**The COVID-19 pandemic has made us more aware than ever of the importance of tech and how it allows us to stay connected to each other when our traditional means of communication are limited. These advancements also go hand in hand with getting over hurdles that have limited our effectiveness in improving overall health.**

Written by: Tim Regan

9/20/2020

Senior living providers are spending much more on technology during Covid-19, even if many of them are also not sure what they’ll do with it in the future.

Those are among the findings of a [new survey](#) conducted by Senior Housing News in partnership with global health technology firm Philips. The survey — conducted online from July 30 to Aug. 17 — contains responses from more than 250 members of the Senior Housing News audience.

According to the survey, 80% of respondents reported an increase in tech spending this year to help address the Covid-19 pandemic. And looking ahead, 87% said they expect their organizations to increase their technology budgets in 2021, spending more on items such as resident monitoring, contact tracing, telehealth and virtual tours.

At the same time, many providers aren’t certain what the future will bring, with 56% of all respondents indicating that they have a general understanding of technology use with regard to Covid-19, but without a concrete plan for the future.

In just six short months, the Covid-19 pandemic has turned senior living operations on their head. For many providers, the period has been a “baptism by fire” in using technology, according to Majd Alwan, senior vice president of technology and business strategy and executive director of the LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST).

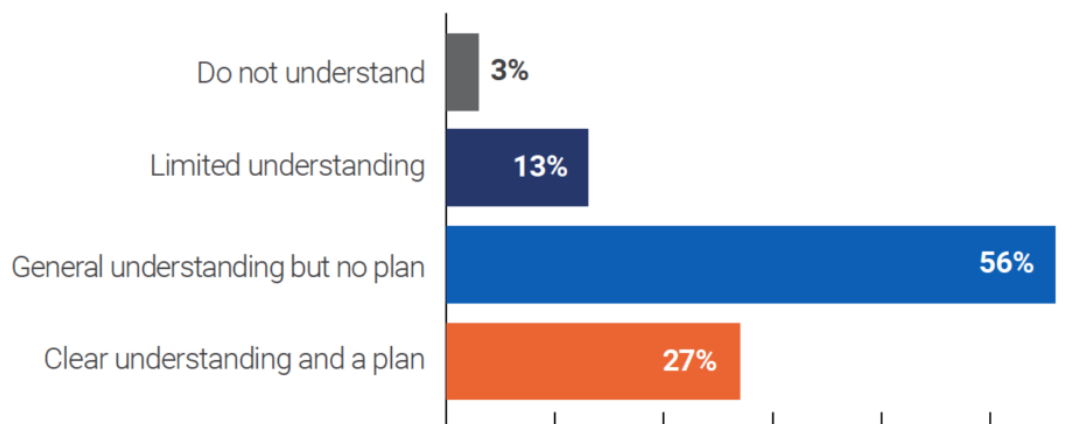
For example, many senior living providers are now seeing the value of having robust internet access, which is a “must-have” in any successful tech strategy.

“A lot of the providers that were skeptical about the value of internet connectivity now see why it needs to be available,” Alwan told Senior Housing News.

And it’s not only a must-have for providers. In the age of Covid-19, family members are placing much more value on connectivity in senior living communities, according to Laurie Orlov, a tech industry veteran who is the founder of Aging in Place Technology Watch.

“Families will demand it,” Orlov told SHN. “The need to have technology access in senior living has jumped up a level, and it will stay there.”

Which of the following statements best describes your technology approach to COVID-19?



**Telehealth use rises**

Perhaps the biggest way that senior living providers have embraced technology in the last six months is [through the use of telehealth](#). Changes in federal policy and certain allowances or flexibilities from regulators have made it easier to implement and pay for telehealth in the Covid-19 era, and providers have taken advantage of that.

Among the recent survey’s respondents, 68% said their company implemented telehealth since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. The main benefit of using telehealth during a pandemic is fairly straightforward: these systems give senior living residents a way to access medical care without leaving the communities where they live.

From his vantage point as an industry-watcher, Alwan said he’s seen significant interest among providers in implementing telehealth, ranging from biometric remote patient monitoring to virtual visits between residents and their physicians.

Among the top reasons why senior living providers have implemented telehealth in their communities, 54% reported convenience, while 49% said greater reimbursement and 28% said cost savings, according to the SHN/Philips survey.

As those answers reflect, recent trends in reimbursement have helped add fuel to the telehealth trend. In April, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) implemented new flexibilities regarding telehealth reimbursement, no matter where the patient is located. CMS also increased the number of telehealth services

that could be reimbursed by Medicare, including ER visits, nursing facility visits, discharges and therapy services. The agency also created new flexibility to conduct telehealth visits on common video apps such as FaceTime or Skype.

Payers have noted the uptick in usage, according to Andy McMahon, vice president of health and human services policy at UnitedHealthcare Community & State. UnitedHealthcare has seen telehealth “skyrocketing,” with a 20-fold increase in usage among its long-term care population earlier this year before leveling off.

“From where we sit, there’s an enormous opportunity, if we can deploy a remote care management system in a much broader way, that we could dramatically expand the access and reach that we have for our members,” McMahon said on a panel discussion [at the recent 2020 Collaborative Care HIT Summit](#).

### Spending trends

The Covid-19 pandemic is driving up expenses across the senior living industry, and technology budgets are no exception.

In the first half of 2020, 17% of respondents reported increasing technology spending by 50% or more, 36% said they increased technology spending by 25% to 50%, and 30% said they increased technology spending by less than 25%. Just 14% reported no change in technology spending in the first half of 2020, while 3% said they actually spent less in that time.

Senior living providers plan to spend even more money on technology in 2021, with 14% planning to increase tech spending by 50% or more, 40% planning to increase tech spending by 25% to 50%, and 33% planning to increase tech spending by 25% or less. Only 12% of respondents plan no change to their tech spending in 2021, while a meager 1% plan to decrease it.

Elevated technology spending is likely to be the state of play for the foreseeable future as the pandemic continues. But, providers will likely be able to amortize large investments over a period of years, or find other ways to make do, Orlov said.

“They’re not going to have a choice,” Orlov said. “And if it causes a problem with their profits for a period of time, so be it, they’ll adjust.”

What providers plan to spend that money on varies, however. According to the SHN/Philips survey, 45% of respondents said they plan to increase their investments in virtual activities and engagement for residents this year and next, while 35% said they planned to invest more in virtual tours during that time and 33% named telehealth and remote resident monitoring.

Other top areas for investments in 2020 and 2021 included resident safety or emergency call systems, infection control, sales and marketing and staffing management.

### Some hurdles remain

While it’s clear senior living providers are spending more on technology during the pandemic than in the past, there are still some hurdles to implementing tech. Chief among them: Wi-Fi and building infrastructure, with 34% citing the former, and 30% citing the latter as hindering their ability to implement technology to mitigate the pandemic.

“If you go into a community... and there’s no Wi-Fi in the room, people will not put up with that,” Orlov said. “They

may never have asked about it before, but the tour is going to have to include it.”

Dated buildings with older copper wiring are also likely exacerbating the problem. And providers would do well to invest in their infrastructure in the same way they might invest in their high-end amenities, as therein lies a “golden opportunity” to prepare for future technological needs and strategies, according to Alwan.

“Generally speaking in the aging services sector, we invest in refurbishing apartment buildings and campuses with manicured landscaping, with fountains, marble entrances, fancy chandeliers,” Alwan said. “But when it comes to investing in the proper technology infrastructure, we somehow choke on that.”

Whether the senior living industry is truly ready for the next health crisis after Covid-19 largely depends on the characteristics of that crisis. But among the survey’s respondents, there was a sense of optimism, as 28% said they felt fully prepared for the next health crisis and 47% felt mostly prepared.

Alwan agrees with that sentiment — but with a warning that providers should not get complacent about the future.

“Preparedness and technology are both ever-changing,” he said. “And it’s a journey, it’s not a destination.”