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4 Lessons for Senior Living from 2020

Written by: Lois A. Bowers

1/11/2021

Five senior living industry leaders recently took the time to share with me — for you — their insights into the biggest challenges that faced owners and operators in 2020 and the challenges they will face in 2021. You can read more [here](#), but from their remarks, I've gleaned four lessons for the senior living industry for this year.

1. Communication with policymakers, media critical.

Communication took on added importance in 2020 as providers competed for attention and resources to fight COVID-19.

"The pandemic's impact on older adults has both brought new attention to and understanding of aging services and senior living while also highlighting that the needs of older adults and those who care for them are not prioritized," LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan said. "So as an industry, we've had to advocate heavily to get the much-needed resources, whether [personal protective equipment], tests and supplies, or funding, to keep older adults and staff safe."

In 2021, she added, "We've got to continue to raise our voices to remain on policymakers' radar."

Advocacy at the state and federal levels always has been important in aging services, Sloan said, "but the pandemic has certainly underscored the importance of engaging with policymakers."

The importance of educating members of the lay media was evident in 2020, too.

"This pandemic brought to light how misunderstood the senior living industry truly is," Argentum President and CEO James Balda said. "We spent countless hours educating reporters and policymakers on the differences that

exist among long-term care settings, which has proven to be critical in acquiring the resources necessary to continue to battle this virus.”

The relationships forged or strengthened in 2020 will serve the industry well as it continues to advocate for resources to battle the pandemic, prioritization for vaccines and other issues as well as fight against possible increased federal regulation now that the spotlight on the industry has intensified.

2. A healthy company culture can help alleviate staffing issues.

Recruiting and retaining competent workers is a perennial challenge for senior living operators. During the pandemic, companies have used hero pay and agency assistance to address shortfalls, National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care President and CEO Brian Jurutka pointed out.

“That said, this is a time when culture within the community staff becomes a differentiator,” he said. “The pandemic, in addition to shining a spotlight on the sector, has also helped illuminate the space where culture plays — that space between words and actions. Those with a strong culture have an additional tool at their disposal to help minimize the continued staffing challenges faced by the sector.

3. The industry is stronger working together.

“Every other issue has been trivial compared to what our providers went through this year,” National Center for Assisted Living Executive Director Scott Tittle said. “This was by far the most difficult and distressing event our sector has ever faced.”

As part of responding to the challenges associated with COVID-19, operators began working together to source PPE and solve other problems. Often, the connections were facilitated through the trade groups representing providers. The experiences of 2020, Tittle said, “really highlighted the importance of our association and other professional groups as well.”

“For many assisted living providers, they haven’t seen a need to belong to a national organization, given that it’s a state-regulated industry. But our ability to work with the administration and Congress to relay what’s happening on the frontlines and advocate for resources has been instrumental,” he said. “Assisted living really felt forgotten in the early months of the pandemic, but we made it our job to not let that happen, and now assisted living providers have access to federal dollars, testing and vaccine priority. And as we prepare for a new administration and Congress, we’ll continue to play a pivotal role in helping policymakers understand our profession, what happened and how we move forward.”

4. The senior living industry is resilient.

The senior living profession — from frontline workers to those making decisions in the administrator’s office and the boardroom to those assisting and advocating for them in associations — have shown incredible resilience over the course of the pandemic.

This quality will serve the industry well as the pandemic continues and as it ultimately subsides and the industry works to adapt and regain consumer confidence.

“COVID impacted every aspect of the business in unprecedented ways,” American Seniors Housing Association President David Schless said, adding that he does not believe that the industry will be permanently impaired by COVID-19.

“There is work to be done to regain consumer confidence, and I am confident that will happen,” he said. “The

industry will come out of the tragic pandemic stronger and will be better equipped to play a role in the broader healthcare system. I think the industry will also be better equipped to communicate with families and better equipped to engage older adults in the future.”

The key, he said, will be for communities to be “well-conceived and well-operated.” That, of course, is true at all times.

“There will be many changes and lessons learned throughout the entire healthcare system, not just long-term care,” NCAL’s Scott Tittle said. “We hope this crisis will shine a light on the need to prioritize our nation’s seniors to ensure they have access to high-quality care and meaningful connections with their loved ones and surrounding communities.”

NIC’s Jurutka said, “Taken in its entirety, the future of seniors housing is bright and will continue to serve older Americans as it provides care, housing, socialization, and a better quality of life for millions.”

Read more insights from these association leaders [here](#).



WHO Issues New Infection Prevention, Control Guidance for Assisted Living Operators Facing SARS-CoV-2

Written by: Kimberly Bonvissuto

1/11/2021

Early detection, education and training, as well as consistent implementation of infection prevention and control policies are necessary to protect the mental and physical health of residents and staff members of assisted living communities and other long-term care and congregate living settings, according to [updated guidance](#) released Friday by the World Health Organization.

“Compassionate, respectful, people-centered care should be provided consistently, while ensuring adequate protection of residents, visitors and staff from COVID-19,” states the guidance, meant to prevent SARS-CoV-2 from entering long-term care facilities and support safe visitation.

COVID-19 [infection prevention and control efforts](#) are among the senior living-related areas that [Argentum](#) expects the new Congress to take on this year. Assisted living operators also cited infection prevention and control among their top challenges for 2020 and 2021, according to an Argentum [survey](#).

Evidence, the WHO states, shows that consistent and rigorous implementation of infection prevention and control policies and measures significantly reduces the risk of SARS-Co-V-2 infection in residents and staff.

(Continued on next page)

The most effective interventions to prevent the control and spread of the virus in long-term care communities, according to the guidance, include:

- Screening and testing of residents, staff members and visitors;
- Adequate personal protective equipment;
- Cohorting of employees and residents;
- Paid, mandatory sick leave;
- Physical distancing, masks and hand hygiene;
- Isolation of people who test positive;
- Routine disinfection of surfaces;
- Adequate ventilation; and
- Adequate staffing.

The WHO further recommends that operators communicate the existence of positive cases to local and regional health authorities, avoid using temporary workers, vaccinate staff and residents, and educate staff, residents and visitors on the importance of hand-washing, mask-wearing and physical distancing.

“It is important that anyone eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine receives all recommended doses at the recommended interval,” the guidance reads. “It is also vital that staff, caregivers and residents continue to adhere to precautions to minimize the spread of infection while more data become available on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines.”

Given the magnitude of the effect of COVID-19 in assisted living and other congregate facilities, the WHO issued a [policy brief](#) in July about preventing and managing the virus across long-term care services. The brief advocates modifying services so they are integrated as part of the continuum of care, ensuring that residents receive “quality, equitable and sustainable care.”

That policy brief also recommends establishing a coordinated response between healthcare and long-term care systems, supporting unregulated providers, and monitoring implementation measures in long-term care settings to ensure that residents receive comprehensive care.

Colin Milner, CEO of the International Council on Active Aging, was a member of the external peer view group involved with the guidance.

SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

Executive Forecast 2021: A Rare Chance for Senior Living Reinvention

Written by: Tim Mullaney

1/5/2021

“When you’re in a chaotic environment, you white-knuckle the status quo. We just can’t do that. We really have to think about what is the ‘new next’ that we are going towards.”

Those are the words of Sequoia Living President and CEO Sara McVey, and they capture a common sentiment among other top executives in the sector: Despite all the challenges and heartbreak caused by Covid-19, these

leaders are also embracing pandemic-related disruption as a chance to reinvent senior living for the future.

From novel ways of communicating with residents and staff, to new services and technology introduced as a result of Covid-19, to development opportunities that are now arising, top senior living executives are identifying ways that the pandemic has strengthened operations and opened up avenues for expansion.

As a result, they are optimistic that their companies and the industry as a whole will emerge from the pandemic stronger, and they are eager to build momentum over the next 12 months.

To learn more about how senior living executives are feeling heading into the new year, Senior Housing News connected with a handful of industry leaders. What follows is the second part of a two-part series sharing those responses:

Collette Gray, President and CEO, Integral Senior Living:

While the Covid-19 pandemic certainly rattled the senior living industry in 2020, we feel our Integral Senior Living and Solstice Senior Living communities really stepped up to provide incredible service for our residents.

We asked so much of our associates in making them pivot overnight in how they keep residents engaged, entertained, and connected to family and friends and even how we went about serving them meals safely. Our first priority when the pandemic hit was to be transparent with our residents, their families, and the ISL and SSL associates, and keep the virus out of our communities. We wanted everyone to know exactly where we stood with confirmed cases and protocols that changed as often as needed to keep everyone protected. Our regular communication and town hall meetings really allowed people the chance to have their questions and concerns heard, and we valued all of the input.

ISL and SSL are very optimistic about 2021. While the virus is still going strong, we are celebrating that Shavano Park Senior Living in Texas was the first ISL community to receive their vaccines, on December 28. We have many more around the country that have received dates of their vaccine clinics in the immediate future. Our focus right now is educating our residents and associates about the importance of getting vaccinated. The vaccine will allow our communities the flexibility to slowly return to normal and, more importantly, help slow the spread within senior living communities.

While slowing the spread of Covid-19 is a key focus, we are also looking forward to new opportunities in 2021. We have opened 4 communities during the pandemic and have another 8 opening before June 2021. In addition, we've transitioned several new communities into the ISL portfolio, so business continues to flourish, and we work with an incredible group of owners that are committed to the senior living space. We have adopted many topnotch safety technologies to make our communities as clean as possible, including Safe Family Lounges that separate indoor and outdoor environments; Health ENTRY Portals that utilize UV light at entrances; electrostatic handheld sprayers; Accushield screening devices; needlepoint bipolar ionization for air purification; and microbicidal paint.

Larry Gumina, CEO of Ohio Living:

We have an obligation to continue to advocate. I think that's where an opportunity is, not only at Ohio Living. In Ohio, I'm 12 miles from the Capitol. If I look at the new House coming in, the new Senate coming into Ohio, a large percentage of those legislators have no clue — with all due respect — about the health care industry, let alone the aging services sector. So, we have an obligation to educate. That's part of our agenda; part of my agenda. If we can assist in the education of those legislators, they'll be in a better position to advocate on our behalf for changes.

I think what we're going through in the whole industry that I'm opportunistically enthused about is that we're going through a reset, right? We're going to go through a reinvention and we're going to go through a recovery. So, if you lump everything in together, we're resetting. I think our segment of the health care industry has been fertile for disruption for a long time. I'm a glass-half-full kind of guy, but I know that at the end, we'll come out stronger as a result of what we're experiencing right now.

Andy Kohlberg, CEO of Kisco Senior Living:

The industry overall has to make an effort and do a better job of communicating the difference between nursing homes and senior living. Most of the bad [pandemic] publicity and deaths occurred in nursing homes.

We've got a whole campaign going called Kisco Confidence, which is designed to communicate to people why it's safer to live with us than at home, in terms of cleanliness and protocols. We're doing grocery shopping for people and all kinds of stuff.

There's always going to be a segment of the population that doesn't want to move in to a senior living community. We think Covid will change the dynamic a bit, and that some people will think that's is safer living in a community than at home. We've done a survey of people who moved in with us during Covid. Most are saying they feel much safer in our community than at home. That's obviously not everybody. There are people who have pulled their family members out of a community ... and that's fine. But our job as an industry and a company is to communicate very clearly why what we're doing makes it safer to live in a community than at home.

Wages are probably not going down to pre-Covid levels, especially in the caregiving settings. Where we compete with hospitality and restaurants — dining servers, things like that — I think we can be a little more confident that [wages] won't be going up as much as caregivers'.

In terms of revenue, we've been using dynamic pricing for two to three years now. We're getting better at it. We have great systems to dynamic price monthly. We're trying to find out what services we provided during Covid that people want long-term. Going out and getting groceries for residents, doing their personal shopping, does that continue past Covid? Me, for example, I love going to the store and drive in and they put [items] in the back of your car. I would love to do that post-Covid, rather than go in the store and muck around and check out and wait in line. Those are the kind of things that we're looking at — that people decided, hey, this is a really good service, I'm going to pay for it, I like it, and we're going to do it long-term.

Jim Gray, President of Bridgewood Property Company:

We will continue a trend started this summer in hiring many key staff positions from the hospitality industry. The senior living industry has rightfully been very focused on care, particularly during the pandemic, but often overlooks that residents are expecting (and deserving) superior lodging, dining, transportation, and activity services as well.

Our new director of hospitality brings over 15 years of experience from Hilton and Marriott luxury brands. We have also hired executive directors and marketing directors from the hospitality field this past year and will continue to do so in 2021.

A downturn provides opportunity to assess next steps for our current portfolio and future growth. We believe the current environment provides great opportunities to acquire sites for future development which had previously been unavailable. Bridgewood acquired a new site for a mid-rise urban senior living community in Charlotte, North Carolina last month and will be closing on a similar site in Tennessee upon receipt of zoning approvals in early 2021.

It is imperative that we do not reduce or pull back on the improved quality control standards implemented as a result of the pandemic. Many of these standards and protocols should be maintained going forward for the health and welfare of all residents and staff even after the Covid pandemic has subsided. As a result, we anticipate a significant reduction in seasonal flu outbreaks within our communities in future years.

Randy Bury, President and CEO of Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society:

We've got to get consumer confidence back. We have to convince the public that our buildings are safe places to be. Visitation requirements worked against us. They were necessary, we had to do them, but the public doesn't like it and neither do we. But that's created the impression that once you go in, you're isolated.

A lot of it is getting the word out, and our sales and marketing team are working hard on a campaign to do that. Also, in the earned media category, we've been working really hard to tell positive stories, the wonderful stories of staff stepping up and creating ways to connect people. The isolation, the depression, those are real things, those are tangible downsides of our visitor restrictions, so I think the more you can do to communicate — Dr. Greg Johnson, our CMO, is having Facebook Live sessions for families to ask questions about what's going on with the vaccine or anything else they have on their mind.

I think communication has never been more than it is right now, to get our message out and try to spread that word that this vaccine is real, it's coming soon, and you can have confidence in the safety of our buildings.

Dwayne Clark, Founder and CEO of Aegis Living:

I think there's this backlog of people that's going to pump up occupancies. What's compounding that is the fact that there's been no development because finance has been on the sidelines. So, you're going to see this dip where demand keeps going up, but product is not available. That's really going to impact demand in the short-term and probably the mid-term. So, for the next six months to probably the next three years ... that's very good news for the industry.

I think the banks will get off the sidelines and probably in Q2 start lending back at close to normal terms again. And I think you'll see in the fall of '21 some of the novices come back into the industry, because they'll see that demand curve and they'll see the lack of new product. I think that will be compelling to them.

I think you'll see the veteran providers get more medically oriented. I think this pandemic has taught them that we deal with very sick people, and you have to have more medical professionals — that means nurses and doctors — on the front lines. That's not typically been true in assisted living. We're looking to hire a chief medical officer — we've had one before — so, we're going that way.

I think you'll see the industry becoming more wellness-oriented, not only [having] care providers, but everything from the way they design air filtration systems to foods; we're looking at foods that help pump up the immune systems of residents and have hired our own registered dietitian, but we're also reaching out to holistic providers and people that have dealt in the world of wellness and nutrition.

I think you're going to see a psychiatric issue both with residents and staff around the pandemic. It's going to last a long, long time. At Aegis, one of the things we're doing is we're offering a lot more counseling. We have seminars and podcasts with psychologist and psychiatrists, because I think the stress and trauma of this is going to be everlasting. It's not going to go away.

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Terri Cunliffe, President and CEO of Covenant Living:

For virtually everyone in senior living, 2021 couldn't get here fast enough as we've all managed (and continue to manage) our way through the pandemic. We view the distribution of the coronavirus vaccine as a pinpoint of light at the end of the tunnel, yet there is a long way to go.

As we move into 2021, I think there are many lessons that we can build upon to even further strengthen our organization.

1) Continue to focus and build upon the employee experience. We know our employees are among our greatest assets and as we move forward, we will continue to build upon our relationship with employees through increased training and career opportunities, reward those for exceptional service and how to better retain employees we've already invested in.

2) We learned during the pandemic that the spirit of collaboration among our workforce at all levels has greatly improved. We'd like to continue capitalize on that spirit for the continued success of our operations and for service to our residents.

3) Covenant Living is going to take a deeper dive into telehealth and how it can make a difference in access to healthcare for our residents. While it has always been part of what is offered, increasing the ease of access to healthcare residents has become more evident during the pandemic.

4) And finally, while we've always communicated to our residents and employees, during the pandemic, outreach and communication was significantly increased. We released weekly video messages in the spring, which has evolved into a monthly video program called Covenant Life Today. The feedback we're getting is that our residents welcome the open and frequent communications within each community or from our central office — either by video or through the written letters. We will keep the pace of those communications going and explore more ways to keep the lines of communication open.

Sara McVey, President and CEO, Sequoia Living:

History is being made in our industry, and we're a part of it. I want to make sure we maximize that as much as we can.

People keep talking about the new normal and bouncing back, and we've really been saying somewhat the opposite. We want to create the "new next," and we have no desire to bounce back, we want to bounce forward. We have some heavy lifting to do as an organization ... to make that happen, there are some things we have to do differently.

The near-term focus is to strengthen our core. We did a strategic planning process this year. What we learned after a deep dive into what we currently do is that — while we may be really good at what we do, we need to grow our capacity to do what we do, so when we have an opportunity to get bigger, we can do it from a real, legitimate position of strength and leadership.

So, there are four priorities for 2021. To strengthen the core, which means [stabilizing Viamonte](#) and improving the operations of our current life plan communities. We did operational audits that identified where we've had service and cost creep. Those findings are integrated into the 2021 budget. We have very aggressive goals for this next year, even though it's a Covid-type environment.

The second is really people power. We really need to make sure we're filling the bench with superheroes and celebrating people. The talent and energy required to walk through the doors every day got a whole lot harder.

And, sometimes, when you've been around a while you have people that have been in there, and times have changed, and you just need to make sure that you have the right people in the right place doing the right things at the right time.

The third is, we need to build our brand and re-state our value propositions. We changed our name in 2019, there was a CEO change that year, and then Covid hit. So, we really haven't totally come out as Sequoia Living and talked about why we exist. The value proposition for all our locations, our senior centers, our affordable communities and our life plan communities, need to be rescripted. Because what was appealing yesterday is no longer, today.

The fourth priority is really just to control Covid. We know we can't really control it, per se, but we can control our reaction and response to it. While we're safeguarding our people, we also need to understand that we have to reactivate our programs.

I think "unlearning" is probably the biggest thing that needs to happen. When you're in a chaotic environment, you white-knuckle the status quo. We just can't do that. We really have to think about what is the "new next" that we are going towards. We can honor the past, but we can't keep going back there ... my perspective right now is, we have to be honest with ourselves and say, okay, we have to totally change how we're doing things so we can survive long term, and when you're already a financially strong organization like Sequoia, that urgency can be a little watered down. But Covid has given us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to accelerate and get there faster. That's really our goal for 2021.

SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

Providers Stay Nimble, Prepare for Hurdles as Covid-19 Vaccine Reaches Senior Living

Written by: Regan

1/6/2021

The Covid-19 vaccine has arrived in the senior living industry amid a troubled initial rollout nationally. Many are reporting good, albeit early, progress, and they are preparing for obstacles appearing on the horizon.

Providers across the country, including large organizations such as Brookdale Senior Living (NYSE: BKD) and Atria Senior Living, began administering the long-awaited vaccine doses [shortly before Christmas](#). And in the days since, that effort has widened to other senior living providers across the country.

For the senior living industry, the vaccine represents the light at the end of the tunnel of the Covid-19 pandemic. Getting there won't be easy, both for senior living and for the country as [some states fumble their early distribution plans](#) and [misinformation regarding the vaccine](#) runs rampant.

Senior living providers have encountered hurdles such as uncertainty regarding vaccine supplies, complicated documentation processes with short submission timelines and prioritization plans that leave some senior living residents waiting for a vaccine. And they are making difficult decisions, including whether to mandate vaccination for team members, and how to encourage residents to receive the vaccine.

Still, many of these same providers have confronted those challenges with careful planning and forethought.

They include McLean, Virginia-based Sunrise Senior Living, which is planning vaccine clinics across more than 230 U.S. communities; Bloomfield, New Jersey-based Juniper Communities, which held its first clinics in late December; and Dallas-based Pegasus Senior Living, which held its first clinics Monday. All three providers are working with CVS Health (NYSE: CVS) and its pharmacy subsidiary Omnicare, which along with Walgreens are part of the federal government's plan for distributing the vaccine in senior housing and long-term care settings.

Other providers, such as Marietta, Georgia-based Sterling Estates; and Milwaukie, Oregon-based Marquis Companies, along with its in-house pharmacy Consonus Pharmacy, have taken a different approach by directly handling the vaccine rollout.

'Education is key'

For many senior living providers, the vaccination effort began long before any doses arrived at their communities.

For example, Sunrise has focused in recent weeks on providing communities with educational resources on the vaccine from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And that education effort is paying off now as Sunrise ramps up its vaccination efforts, according to Chief Clinical Officer Sue Coppola.

"Many of our communities are also hosting town halls where the vaccination process is explained in more detail, concerns are addressed and fact sheets are made available on the vaccine, all of which help ensure that consent forms are fully understood and signed by individuals who want to receive the vaccine," Coppola told Senior Housing News. "We have also hosted calls that team members can join to ask a nurse vaccine-related questions."

While Sunrise declined to share exactly how many residents and staff had received their first shot as of Wednesday, Coppola added that "the vast majority of our clinics thus far have been smooth, successful and truly joyful." The company is taking an "experiential" approach to its vaccine clinics, including by diffusing calming essential oils, playing relaxing music, and having snack and beverage carts available.

"We have every reason to expect that trend to continue, and we will learn and amend processes and approaches as we move forward," Coppola said.

Meanwhile, Tucson, Arizona-based Watermark Retirement Communities has held overseen the administration of about 500 vaccine doses in seven of its 60 communities across the U.S.

"We anticipate early spring [for] completing the pharmacy clinics for vaccinations, depending on how the allocations continue for senior living," Watermark National Director of Health Strategy Stephanie Boreale told SHN.

Juniper held its first clinic at its Juniper Village at the Speary Center community in Denver on Dec. 29. All of the community's associates and all but three of its 127 residents received their first vaccine dose during the clinic, CEO Lynne Katzmann said.

That high rate of adoption was aided by the fact that Juniper spent considerable time preparing residents and staff for the vaccine. For example, the company held a vaccine information webinar for its associates long before the first doses arrived.

During the webinar, a registered nurse who participated in the Moderna vaccine clinical trial helped answer questions about the vaccine.

“That was remarkably helpful, because she’s a trusted and knowledgeable individual,” Katzmann said. “She also happens to be older, and was able to answer a lot of questions for people.”

Juniper aimed other education efforts at residents and their families. The company shared updates about the vaccine online and in emails and calls, and also held a separate webinar for families and residents starring a medical director from Redwood Health Partners.

“Education is key,” Katzmann said.

Education also paid off for Birmingham, Michigan-based Bloom Senior Living, which owns and operates nine communities in Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and South Carolina. The company held its first vaccine clinics at a community in South Carolina on Wednesday, during which 93% of the community’s 50 residents received their first dose.

Like other providers, Bloom held town hall meetings and distributed information among residents and staff to win trust that the vaccine was safe and effective, according to Melissa Campbell, the company’s director of education and development.

“The key to a successful program really is education,” Campbell said. “There tends to be so much false information that gets passed around social media, so getting true, science-based information to the residents and to the associates is so important.”

Although residents participation was high, less than half of the community’s workers had opted to take the vaccine, Campbell said. But this might just be a case of not wanting to go first in a national vaccine rollout.

“I expect in our next round ... for there to be an increase in associate participation,” Campbell added.

Juniper made getting a vaccine a requirement for employment, a step that experts consider [legally sound, with some exceptions](#) — but one that some other senior living providers have considered too risky to undertake.

One big risk is that some employees will simply quit their job instead of getting the vaccine. Another is that doing so may expose providers to legal risks.

No doubt, Katzmann thinks there will be a small number of Juniper associates who may resign from their duties, or seek medical exemptions from taking the vaccine. But, she also believes that these risks are outweighed by the risks of the pandemic itself.

“Our whole strategy has been based on prevention ... and that’s what the vaccine is,” Katzmann said. “So, it was a relatively simple decision to make.”

Katzmann’s advice to other providers going through the vaccination process is to start early, and stay on top of documentation with residents and their families.

“You have to figure out who’s going to be signing the consent form for each individual that will be vaccinated ... so, doing that ahead of time is really helpful,” she explained.

Another piece of advice: check privacy screen supplies, as senior living communities with private rooms don’t always have them. And it might not hurt for those getting their shots to take an Advil or Tylenol and stay hydrated to ward off vaccine-related side effects, Katzmann said.

Preparation was also a key to success for Pegasus. While the company held its first vaccine clinic at its flagship community in Austin, Texas, on Tuesday, it had prepared for the process already, according to Dr. Sandra Petersen, who is leading the provider's Covid-19 efforts.

In preparation for the vaccines, the company developed an "all-hands-on-deck" plan that thought through every facet of operations, from aiding residents at the vaccine clinics to planning for meals.

"We thought through every aspect of it," Petersen said. "Both in our day-to-day operations and how it would impact that, as well as how we could have a co-occurring clinic and still meet the needs of our residents."

Like Juniper, Pegasus also worked to get residents' consent forms in order before the first doses arrived at their communities.

"Letting people know early and getting all the paperwork in place, getting insurance ready to go ... the more pre-work you can do, the better," Petersen said.

Leading the rollout

While many senior living providers chose to work with pharmacy providers Walgreens or CVS under the Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program, others chose to spearhead the effort themselves Partner Nathan Madigan. If all goes according to plan, Sterling Estates will begin holding its second round of vaccination clinics in a matter of weeks.

"We all kind of put our heads together and worked as a team to get those clinics up and running," Madigan told SHN. "It is a testament to that partnership that you're getting a vaccine, and in less than 24 hours we were spinning up our immunization clinics."

Hurdles remain

Despite the early success in holding vaccination clinics, many senior living providers also see challenges ahead to overcome.

One is whether there will be enough vaccines to meet the demand of the industry. At Pegasus, Petersen said she's heard that there may be shortages in the future, though she has yet to see whether that holds true.

So far, the process appears to be going as planned, according to the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL), which represents more than 14,000 nursing homes and assisted living communities across the U.S.

"As of right now, we are not aware of widespread issues or delays with this vaccine rollout, and if there were, we would be among the first to sound the alarm," said Mark Parkinson, president and CEO of AHCA/NCAL, in a press release Wednesday. "We continue to assist a minority of member providers who come to us looking for assistance or clarity, but the majority of providers tell us that their clinics have been scheduled or have already occurred and that overall, the program is running smoothly."

State policies themselves are also somewhat of a challenge for senior living providers. Because each state controls the vaccine allocations, they potentially operate under different rules.

"This is a real problem, because not every state is defining the order for vaccination in the same way that [the CDC committee recommended](#)," Katzmann said.

Meanwhile, some senior living communities are still waiting to hear back from their pharmacy providers regarding scheduling their first clinic. Watermark is still waiting to schedule clinics in the state of Arizona for assisted living and independent living residents. Sunrise, too, is waiting for some states to add senior living residents to the prioritization list.

“In many states, skilled nursing has been prioritized, and this represents a relatively small segment of our resident population,” Coppola said. “We’re now seeing some states include assisted living and memory care communities as well. We continue to work with CVS Health regarding dates for clinics at each of our communities.”

In Texas, where Pegasus is headquartered, health officials chose to open up the second vaccination phase to people 65 and older or with certain medical conditions, not just those living in senior living communities. Other states [have taken similar steps](#).

“If there had been a focus on senior care ... before opening it up to people at-large, that would have maybe been a little better as far as the distribution and supply-and-demand goes,” Petersen said.

Still, while there are sure to be challenges in the vaccination effort, they are all manageable given the circumstances, according to Katzmann.

“When you’re down to this point, and you’re going to get a vaccine that keeps people alive, none of that seems really to be so awful,” Katzmann said. “It’s hard, but you do it.”