



LONG-TERM CARE AND ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES: THE OVERLOOKED HEALTHCARE HEROES

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Despite risks to their own health and safety, millions of front-line workers have been tirelessly performing their jobs for the sake of others. But a particular group of healthcare heroes—long-term care and assisted living communities and their employees—have not appropriately been recognized for their bravery and commitment to serving the most vulnerable portion of our population during the coronavirus pandemic.

Facilities that house elderly patients have devastatingly become centers for coronavirus outbreaks and fatalities. During this extremely difficult time, nursing home and other assisted living employees put their fears aside to deliver hands-on personal or clinical care to their

patients. Elderly patients in these facilities often require significantly more direct and frequent physical contact than other types of healthcare treatment. Additionally, these employees provide intense emotional support to patients who live their lives away from the rest of the world, and who are scared. Because of visitation bans, employees have been a source of comfort and love for sick patients during their final moments.

This pandemic has not only been an emotionally difficult time for long-term care facilities—but they also face financial stress due to large increases in expenses related to personal protective equipment and diminishing revenue streams.

Nursing homes and assisted living facilities have been required to purchase [many more masks, gloves, gowns, and testing kits](#)—all of which are in great demand, making them particularly expensive. Additionally, facilities have made efforts to provide financial incentives to employees who are at much greater risk. On top of this, [occupancy rates in nursing homes have declined](#) since the onset of the coronavirus. This is attributed to state and company restrictions on accepting new patients who have been discharged from hospitals and are recovering from the coronavirus, as well as a [significant reduction in elective surgeries](#), which has reduced the number of patients coming into facilities for rehabilitation.

Federal support has provided temporary financial relief to nursing home operators, but other types of long-term care, such as assisted living facilities, have been left out of aid funding. In April, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) designated [\\$20 billion in funds for Medicare providers](#). This will help keep nursing homes afloat, as a large portion of residents is supported through government health programs. Last week, \$4.9 billion of coronavirus relief funds were [distributed directly to skilled nursing facilities](#) as part of the CARES Act stimulus package.

Unfortunately, assisted living facilities have not received any federal support, despite pleas from the American Health Care Association (AHCA), whose leaders have been vocalizing a need for financial assistance for assisted living facilities that [provide post-acute and long-term care](#). Medicare funding is not as impactful to the assisted living industry, as many patients at these facilities do not pay for care through Medicaid or Medicare. AHCA President and CEO, Mark Parkinson, has spoken out about a need for support, which he would appreciate in any of the following forms: additional PPE, additional testing, or direct funding.

Despite numerous physical, emotional, and financial challenges, the long-term care community—and the selfless employees that are the driving force behind these facilities—have been providing essential care for elderly populations throughout the country during a difficult and uncertain time. We truly owe these facilities greater recognition and support.