

California Commission on Aging

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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor

Executive Director
Karol Swartzlander

May 5, 2020

Secretary Mark Ghaly, MD, MPH
California Health and Human Services Agency
1660 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, California 95814

Sent via email to Mark.Ghaly@chhs.ca.gov

Dear Dr. Ghaly,

The California Commission on Aging (CCoA) is established in the Welfare and Institutions Code as the principal advocate before the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies on behalf of California's older adults.

As you are intensely aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on older adults across the country and in California, particularly those living in skilled nursing facilities and residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), where death rates are skyrocketing. We understand the Administration is working to address the challenges in these and other congregate residential settings. However, given the highly vulnerable population, unique staffing challenges and difficulty obtaining personal protective equipment, the Commission urges the Administration to develop a more organized and visible strategy for these settings. Some immediate steps you could implement are:

- Establish a single state-level leadership structure to ensure a coordinated response and improve communications with facilities, local health department and stakeholders.
- Mandate ongoing testing of all staff and residents in these facilities to allow for improved quarantine and tracking of COVID-19 cases.
- Disaggregate RCFE staff and resident COVID-19 death data to enable a more accurate picture of the impact to that community.
- Leverage the California Health Corps to address staffing shortages.

Additionally, we urge you to follow the recommendations put forth in the California Elder Justice Coalition correspondence of April 13, 2020 (attached), of which the California Commission on Aging was a co-signer, urging stronger protections for residential care staff in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 infections between facilities and from facilities to workers' families.

The safety of these vulnerable residents and their caretakers requires an immediate and definitive response.

Sincerely,

Betsy Butler

Betsy Butler

Chair

cc: Kim McCoy Wade, California Department of Aging