



## **Statement of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations**

**Submitted for the Record by**

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**For the Hearing “Caring for Seniors Amid the COVID-19 Crisis”**

**Before the**

**United States Senate Special Committee on Aging - May 21, 2020**

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 69 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population. We appreciate that Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Casey have held this timely hearing, and we share the following statement regarding LCAO's perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic. We also call attention to the LCAO letters submitted to Congress calling for specific legislative action to address the needs of older adults during this challenging period, available at <https://www.lcao.org/>.

All of us, regardless of age or income, need help to stay well during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Older adults and other people who have severe underlying medical conditions**, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness. Moreover, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **8 of 10 deaths reported in the U.S.** have been in adults 65 years and older.

Older adults are our mothers, fathers, grandparents, and neighbors. Older people are among the people who work to keep our society running: staffing hospitals and long-term care settings, delivering meals, teaching, working at grocery stores, picking up trash, and keeping our government functioning. We all depend on one another. Although COVID-19 doesn't affect every individual and community the same way, LCAO strongly believes that we are all in this pandemic together. We support justice for all and access to affordable, high-quality health care for all.

We call upon the federal government to mobilize quickly to lead the nation through this pandemic. The Administration's COVID-19 Task Force actions, the Families First legislation, and the CARES Act have been an important start; yet, an even more robust federal response is needed, quickly, to protect the health and well-being of older adults, family caregivers, direct care workers, and the professional health and social services workforce. Without immediate federal action, state and local programs and services will have difficulty meeting the needs of older adults all across the country.

People who work in high-risk situations, including all health care and social service workers, must receive sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), testing equipment, and support for contact tracing. The workers needing these materials include all direct care workers, long-term services and support providers, mental health providers, aging network personnel, and senior housing providers who provide on-site, or in-home, health care or social services to older adults and people with disabilities. These personnel also need access to childcare and paid sick leave. Similarly, family caregivers need paid leave from employment to care for older adults and people with disabilities during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately impacted communities of color, with high infection and death rates being reported among Black, Latinx, and Navajo communities, among others. To support marginalized older adults, including older people of color, immigrants, and LGBT older people, the federal government should take the following steps: ensure real-time reporting of data on racial and ethnic disparities; fund culturally and linguistically appropriate services and programs; support community-based organizations; and include and enforce protections against discrimination in all programs.

The federal government must **Take Action** to:

- Provide quality care and protect the rights of nursing home and assisted living residents.
  - Ensure that older adults are empowered to live safely in their homes and other congregate settings.
  - Support safer environments for the workforce serving older adults, including direct care workers and family caregivers.
  - Safeguard the income and retirement security of older adults and generations to come.
- Crosscutting Areas of Greatest Concern:
    - Make available sufficient, appropriate, and affordable personal protective equipment (PPE) for all who work with older adults and for older workers
    - National strategy and payment for expanded testing and contact tracing to reduce transmission
    - Preserve, adjust, and strengthen foundational programs that have proven track records: Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, Older Americans Act, HUD-assisted low-income housing, and pension protections
    - Provide additional funds for technology, training, housing, long-term services and supports, and services

These systemic changes are critical to address the urgent needs of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. As our economy transitions to a “new normal,” we need to adjust supports and services to meet the challenges older adults face. Rebuilding and planning for the future will require careful examination of the long-lasting impact of COVID-19 on older people and concerted federal leadership to address long-standing systemic problems. Making changes on behalf of older adults strengthens our communities and benefits all of us.

Thank you.