

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
White House Coronavirus Task Force
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

On behalf of the undersigned national organizations, we thank the White House Coronavirus Task Force for its continued efforts. As we navigate these trying times, affordable housing communities serving primarily older adults need guidance and regulatory relief, and we urge the Task Force, HUD, and USDA to help older adults living in assisted housing handle this global health emergency.

Centers for Disease Control data show the coronavirus has a disproportionate impact on older adults. While federal guidance has helped nursing homes, hospitals, and other health facilities serving older adults prepare for and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks, HUD- and USDA Rural Development-assisted communities serving older adults have yet to receive the level of regulatory relief and financial resources necessary to allow them to properly address critical health concerns.

More than 1.6 million older adults live in HUD-assisted housing, with more than 1.1 million of these households living in small, medium, and large apartment buildings. Two-thirds of the 380,000 households in USDA-financed rental housing properties include someone who is elderly or has disabilities. We urge HUD, USDA, and the White House Coronavirus Task Force to provide immediate relief and support for housing providers and residents throughout this health emergency.

Federal Agency Actions

Many residents of federally-subsidized housing experience barriers accessing health services and have little means to stock up on food and supplies for an extended quarantine. In addition, many elderly residents have limited mobility or transportation options to get to clinics or testing sites for COVID-19. The White House Coronavirus Task Force, HUD, and USDA should work with health officials and other local, state, and federal agencies, and with lawmakers in Congress, to offer mobile testing access for low-income elderly residents of affordable housing, as well as expanded health and meal services.

Relief for Elderly Residents of Affordable Housing

Given that elderly residents of federally-assisted housing have more chronic conditions than their peers without housing assistance, seniors in HUD- and Rural Development-assisted housing need federal support to prepare and respond to COVID-19. As this situation reaches crisis levels, residents who are economically displaced by COVID-19 need relief from ongoing and new evictions proceedings and should be given access to expanded hardship exemptions and forbearance agreements. Elderly residents also need owners to notify them of any new or existing rights as agencies provide regulatory relief and support.

Relief for Housing Providers

Current emergency preparedness plans and guidance from HUD and USDA do not include infectious disease control. Affordable housing providers, especially those with predominantly senior populations, need significantly more help and direction from the federal government during this crisis. Effective immediately, owners and operators of federally-assisted housing need funding to access extra supplies and staffing, guidance to properly handle a health emergency in their communities, funding for significantly more Service Coordinators, and regulatory relief to prioritize the safety of their residents and maintain the financial and physical soundness of the housing they provide.

We look forward to working together with the White House Coronavirus Task Force to keep our affordable housing communities resilient during this critical time. For questions, please contact Linda Couch, vice president of housing policy with LeadingAge, at 202-508-9416 or lcouch@leadingage.org.

Sincerely,

cc:

The Honorable Ben Carson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Honorable Alex Azar II, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services