



July 22, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer:

Our organizations share a commitment to promoting the health and independence of older adults, people with disabilities and the workforce that supports them. Each of these populations have needs that have grown significantly as COVID-19 continues to spread across the United States. To date, COVID-19 has claimed the lives of more than 56,000 residents and workers in long-term care settings. As you develop legislation to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we urge you to prioritize policies and funding to ensure older adults and people with disabilities can safely access long-term services and supports at home and in the community, in nursing homes, Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICFs/IID), and in other congregate settings amid the ongoing pandemic.

Congress has taken important steps to support Americans during this pandemic. Given the extraordinary circumstances of the ongoing public health crisis and the risks to those we serve and represent, however, we believe more must be done urgently to protect older adults and people with disabilities and to sustain the systems of care that support them. The urgent need to save lives, prevent the spread of the virus, and address the services and support older adults and people with disabilities need cannot be overstated.

As COVID-19 continues to spread in communities across the United States, we are especially concerned about the extreme stress on the workforce supporting people with disabilities and older adults in every setting; limited supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE); insufficient access to testing; and the lack of availability of technology to combat social isolation, including for virtual visits, and to support independent living. Notably, these concerns

are exacerbated by resource constraints on states and health care providers, which have been amplified by the pandemic.

As Congress considers additional legislation to provide COVID-19 relief, we urge you to make a meaningful investment in policies pertaining to long-term services and supports and the dedicated service providers and workforce that care for them. The next COVID-19 relief package should include dedicated, increased federal funding for services and supports in home and community-based settings, nursing homes, ICFs/IID and other congregate settings. Specifically, we urge you to provide targeted funding for the following:

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), Personal Care Attendants (PCAs), and other direct care workers whether paid for through Medicaid, the VA or other federal programs or through private payment arrangements must be furnished with an adequate supply of PPE.
- **Testing:** Both consumers and the workforce supporting them must have access to free COVID-19 testing. This includes a request for timely and prompt processing. Any delay in testing puts both workers and individuals receiving services at risk.
- **States and providers:** To incentivize innovative solutions to provide services during the pandemic and to meet the needs of consumer demands for technology to combat social isolation (including for virtual visits), enhance education, and support employment (possibly due to working remotely), states, home and community-based service providers, nursing homes, ICFs/IID and other congregate settings must be adequately supported.
- **Essential workers in all settings:** Individuals with disabilities and older adults rely on a critical, and often overlooked part of the health care work force— PCAs, DSPs, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNAs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and other direct care workers—to maintain their independence and quality of life. The next COVID-19 relief legislation must include federal funding for: premium pay, paid sick, family and medical leave and child care for this essential workforce. Policies should help address the workforce shortages that pre-dated COVID-19, but have been only further exacerbated by the pandemic. Family caregivers are also essential to helping many older adults and people with disabilities maintain their independence and quality of life, and the challenges they face have increased due to COVID-19. Helping provide relief and support to family caregivers is also an important element of the next COVID-19 package.

We appreciate that the Senate and House have acted to approve previous legislative packages to respond to the ongoing health and economic emergency facing the country. On behalf of older adults, people with disabilities and the workforce on the front lines, we urge lawmakers and leadership to continue their efforts to incorporate the above priorities as you negotiate the next COVID-19 legislation.

Sincerely,

AARP

AHCA (American Health Care Association)

Alzheimer's Association

Alzheimer's Impact Movement

ANCOR (American Network of Community Options and Resources)

Catholic Charities USA

SEIU

The Arc of the United States