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SPECIAL EDITION

Thursday, July 23, 2020

Trump Administration Announces New Resources to Protect Nursing Home Residents Against COVID-19

As part of the unprecedented efforts taken by the Trump Administration, President Trump announced several new CMS initiatives designed to protect nursing home residents from Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

“From the moment the threat of this virus materialized, the Trump Administration has placed a priority on protecting nursing home residents,” said CMS Administrator Seema Verma. “Today’s multi-pronged intervention represents the latest efforts in fulfilling that unwavering commitment. As caseloads continue to increase in areas around the country, it has never been more important that nursing homes have what they need to maintain a sturdy defense against the virus. These measures will help them do exactly that.”

New Funding:

HHS will devote \$5 billion of the [Provider Relief Fund](#) authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to Medicare-certified long term care facilities and state veterans’ homes (“nursing homes”), to build nursing home skills and enhance nursing homes’ response to COVID-19, including enhanced infection control. This funding could be used to address critical needs in nursing homes including hiring additional staff, implementing infection control “mentorship” programs with subject matter experts, increasing testing, and providing additional services, such as technology so residents can connect with their families if they are not able to visit. Nursing homes must participate in the Nursing Home COVID-19 Training (described below) to be qualified to receive this funding. This new funding is in addition to the \$4.9 billion previously announced to offset revenue losses and assist nursing homes with additional costs related to responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency and the shipments of personal protective equipment provided to nursing homes by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Enhanced Testing:

Building on the initiative HHS announced last week, in which rapid point-of-care diagnostic testing devices will be distributed to nursing homes, and the new funding from the Provider Relief Fund, CMS will begin requiring, rather than recommending, that all nursing homes in states with a 5% positivity rate or greater test all nursing home staff each week. This new staff testing requirement will enhance efforts to keep the virus from entering and spreading through nursing homes by identifying asymptomatic carriers.

More than 15,000 testing devices will be deployed over the next few months to help support this mandate, with over 600 devices shipping this week. Funds from the Provider Relief Fund can also be used to pay for additional testing of visitors.

Additional Technical Assistance & Support:

The Trump administration recently deployed federal Task Force Strike Teams to provide onsite technical assistance and education to nursing homes experiencing outbreaks in an effort to help reduce transmission and the risk of COVID-19 spread among residents. The first deployments took place in 18 nursing homes in

Illinois, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas between July 18 and July 20. The Task Force Strike Teams are composed of clinicians and public health service officials from CMS, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health.

The Task Force Strike Teams went into nursing homes based on data they reported to the CDC that indicated an increase in COVID-19 cases. The teams focused on the four key areas of support, including keeping COVID-19 out of facilities, detecting COVID-19 cases quickly, preventing virus transmission, and managing staff. The goal was to determine what immediate actions nursing homes needed to take to help reduce the spread and risk of COVID-19 among residents, and to better understand what federal, state, and local resources nursing homes need to ensure the health and safety of their residents. CMS and its partners plan to use what is learned on the ground to determine remote education and other critical needs to support nursing homes and mitigate future outbreaks.

In addition, CMS, in partnership with the CDC, is rolling out an online, self-paced, on-demand Nursing Home COVID-19 Training focused on infection control and best practices. The training being offered has 23 educational modules and a scenario-based learning modules that include materials on cohorting strategies and using telehealth in nursing homes to assist facilities as they continue to work to mitigate the virus spread in their facilities. This program supplements training already underway to better equip nursing homes to contain and stop the spread of COVID-19. The training is a requirement for nursing homes to receive the additional funding from the Provider Relief Fund Program.

The training will be available to all 15,400 nursing homes nationwide along with specialized technical assistance to nursing homes who have been found to have infection prevention deficiencies in their most recent CMS inspection and had recent COVID-19 cases based upon their data submissions to CDC. A certificate of completion is offered and recognition badges can be downloaded for nursing homes to display on their website.

Weekly Data on High Risk Nursing Homes:

Early on during this pandemic, CMS required nursing homes to inform residents, their families and representatives of COVID-19 cases in their nursing homes. Starting in May, CMS and CDC began collecting weekly data on each nursing home including their number of COVID-19 cases. Now that this data collection process has matured, the White House and CMS will release a list of nursing homes with an increase in cases that will be sent to states each week as part of the weekly Governor's report to ensure states have the information needed to target their support to the highest risk nursing homes.

This announcement builds on the unprecedented and aggressive actions CMS has taken to address the impact of COVID-19 in nursing homes.

See the full text of this excerpted [CMS Press Release](#) (issued July 22), including a list of actions CMS took to address the impact of COVID-19 in nursing homes.

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