



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH
SECRETARY

June 3, 2020

Dear Members of the Healthcare Advocacy Council:

Thank you for your input and attention to the needs of seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. We share your desire to protect our seniors during this crisis and appreciate the feedback related to preventing senior isolation and prioritizing PPE.

We are continuing to examine both federal and state guidance related to visitation in long-term care facilities and are committed to making decisions based on science and data to best protect our seniors. We currently have workgroups composed of internal and external stakeholders helping examine data and inform decisions. In the meantime, DHHS supports offering alternative means of communication for people, such as virtual communications (phone, video-communication such as FaceTime or Skype, texting, etc.). The Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), in partnership with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) and other key Aging and Disability Resource Center stakeholders, has applied for a \$1.6 million grant from Administration of Community Living (ACL) to institute a system of virtual services for older adults, caregivers, persons with disabilities, and professionals to bring about relief, support, and increased capacity throughout the COVID 19 pandemic. One area of focus includes mitigation of social isolation by training long-term care staff on high- and low-tech devices. In addition, a Social Isolation Workgroup has been established, including multiple partners both internal and external to state government. The group continues to work on communication needs and isolation prevention.

Individuals will continue to have access to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, although on a restricted basis as determined by CMS federally. Ombudsmen remain accessible via phone or video format, unless there are end of life situations in which they will be allowed onsite in certain situations. In addition, the Division of Health Services Regulation, as well as, Adult Protective Services are continuing to ensure the safety of seniors. Both are continuing virtual or on-site visits as needed to respond to issues.

We agree that personal protective equipment (PPE) has become one of the largest needs across our state during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have put together a [request process](#) for PPE that is available on our website. In developing this process, we are working to ensure that those at highest risk of severe clinical disease and workers delivering emergent life-saving services are receiving the PPE they need. Long-term care settings are in Group 1 and highest priority. In addition, we recently distributed PPE to over 3,000 long-term care facilities. In addition, our team is working to increase access to testing throughout the state. Our latest [guidance](#) prioritizes testing for high-risk populations including anyone over the age of 65.

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Members of the Healthcare Advocacy Council

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We share your desire to protect our highest risk citizens and appreciate the continued collaboration and support. Thank you for your thoughtful input and for all you are doing to ensure the health and wellbeing of North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mandy K. Cohen". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Secretary