



Whitley Patient Advocates
May 21, 2020

Dr. Mandy Cohen
2001 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2000

Dear Dr. Mandy Cohen,

Thank you for your response in the COVID-19 public health crisis. We in society have charted the unknown and appreciate your efforts in supporting the health and safety of the public. As we move forward, we would like to bring to your attention the issues of loneliness and isolation in our most vulnerable, especially those in our care communities. We're all aware that loneliness has been a growing medical diagnosis that has been affecting this population, already putting them at risk, then add in isolation and they have now more risk factors for a catastrophic health event.

In November 2019 at the Vital Direction's for Health and Healthcare Symposium, you, Governor Cooper, NAM president Dr. Victor Dzau, and key stakeholders from NC and across the nation clearly stated this population as our most vulnerable. We must find ways to combat the isolation and loneliness, putting out a call to action. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic we had to put all vulnerable on lockdown. We now have added loneliness and isolation to our already vulnerable population. For over 8 weeks this has been the case, totally severing support systems with no state or federal support or plan of action to remedy this situation. No mandate for transparency in care or any clear strategies between facilities to display safe care and patient/family support have been implemented.

As we re-open our state and country, we are asking for a call to action to alleviate some of the loneliness and isolation in this population. As a nurse, respiratory therapist and board-certified patient advocates working in healthcare, we are seeing first-hand how this population on lockdown is literally destroying the physical and mental health of our residents, patients, families and communities. COVID-19 is a scary pandemic, however the fact that we have no plan to reunite this population is unethical. This population is our most vulnerable and we are adding to that vulnerability by cutting off all access. Where is the plan of action to support the safe reuniting of this population?

Why are we not having officials enter these areas safely and advocating for safe environments? When will there be a plan to ensure we safely re-open? When a small business can display certificates of knowledge, stating that we are trained to keep our patrons safe, but have nothing similar for employees in long term care communities, we have a problem. Where is the transparency for these care organizations? How do we know they get what they need? How do we know they have been trained; how do we know they are taking care of our population with all the tools and education needed?

Why can't we have volunteers that are highly trained, safely work with this group to ensure they are operating safely? Can we not have health experts, volunteers and family members enter in ways that will support them in physical layouts, social distancing and disinfecting procedures. We have done so in acute

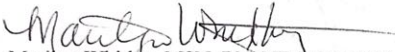
care and the same considerations need to be put in place for the vulnerable in community care centers. We cannot continue on a lockdown without a regulatory agency doing checks and balances on all.

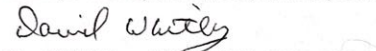
Why should this population feel like they face this alone? The family outside these facilities and the residents within need our support now! We can implement strategies safely, make a plan, we can do this! We offer our support and have known strategies that will work to re-open that we're sure you Dr. Cohen are well aware of.

Let's provide these communities with PPE, testing and support staff. We can support each other through this as we feel a total lock down is not the long-term solution and we need a to call action on this now.

Thank you for your time and we are available for discussion to put together actionable items for success in supporting all as we go forward.

Respectfully


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