



December 18, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Chair
The Honorable Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 North Capitol St NW, Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Governors Cuomo and Hutchinson:

We write to you today to **urge you to develop policy guidance for governors to ensure that senior nutrition provider staff and frontline volunteers are clearly and consistently considered “essential workers,” and given priority as such for COVID-19 vaccinations.** Our two organizations represent the nationwide network of senior nutrition programs that serve millions of at-risk older individuals who rely on, and are in need of, nutritious meals and wellness checks to reduce hunger, isolation and improve their overall health.

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted older adults, who remain at increased risk of COVID-19 and face unique barriers to accessing adequate nutrition and socialization. There are few services more essential than providing meals to the millions of seniors who currently rely on them, not to mention the expansion in home-delivered meal services that the pandemic has required. Additionally, the senior population is increasingly at risk of the harmful effects of social isolation a result of the pandemic. Enabling senior nutrition providers to obtain the vaccine quickly will enable them to interact more directly and in person with older adults in desperate need of human contact.

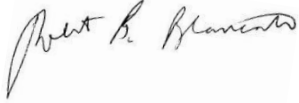
In the national response to COVID-19, some of the nation’s governors have specifically referenced senior nutrition and other Older Americans Act providers on their lists of “essential workers.” Others have been much more imprecise, leading to substantial uncertainty. As Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Eric Hargan stated in a [June letter](#) to governors, “While these workers are not provided the same level of priority as workers who provide direct emergency care and acute care, they should be prioritized along with other workers who provide direct care. Acknowledging this important reality will protect both workers and those they serve.”

A clear and consistent directive from the highest levels designating senior nutrition provider staff and frontline volunteers as a priority population for the COVID-19 vaccination is urgently needed. Otherwise, determinations on vaccine sequencing and prioritization will vary from state to state and are subject to the interpretation of local officials, who may not understand the relevance and importance of these professionals in the aging and senior nutrition network in safely dealing with this crisis, which is primarily affecting older adults.

The vital services delivered each day by senior nutrition programs nationwide are essential to the vulnerable older adult population. We need your assistance to enable them to continue serving these older adults safely and effectively. Priority access to the COVID-19 vaccination for senior nutrition provider staff and frontline volunteers, along with clear assurances and consistent guidance from our nation’s

governors will help ensure the millions of Americans who rely on this network as a lifeline will continue to receive the nutrition and social connection they desperately need.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and
Aging Services Programs (NANASP)



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