

National Aging and Health Organizations on the Role of the Aging Network to Support the Successful Vaccination of the Most At-Risk Populations of Older Adults

February 2, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Adults ages 65-74 are 90 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than their ages 18-29 counterparts. For those ages 75-84, their risk of death is 220 times more likely, and for those age 85 and older, the figure is 630 times more likely.ⁱ Death rates for older adults of color are up to five times that of white people, yet communities of color are receiving the COVID-19 vaccine at much lower rates.ⁱⁱ While a disproportionate number of these deaths occurred among those living in nursing homes and other long-term care institutions, **approximately 95 percent of older adults live at home and in the community, and millions of them will need special assistance to get vaccinated.**

The undersigned organizations urge you, in the next COVID-19 relief package, to deploy resources to the Aging Network to help COVID-19 vaccination efforts targeting the most at-risk and hardest-to-reach older adults.

In the battle to defeat COVID-19, the Aging Network is perfectly positioned to play several important roles that support, and do not supplant or duplicate, efforts underway by local and state public health officials and organizations. The Aging Network's state, local and provider entities are the trusted health and social supports resources for their older adult and caregiver clients. This provides a level of access to older adults, especially those who need help to remain independent and healthy at home, that is not matched by any other entity or network. **They know where these high-risk and**

hard-to-reach older adults are and know how best to educate and support them.

Additionally, because the Aging Network is required under existing federal law to prioritize and target outreach and services to those most in need—specifically including racial minorities and other populations with greatest social and economic need—its involvement benefits our nation’s efforts to focus on and connect with the older adults most affected by racial and/or socioeconomic health disparities in this pandemic and beyond. **The Aging Network has the experience communicating on difficult or complex subjects with all subpopulations of older adults, including those with cognitive challenges, physical disabilities or complicated care needs.**

Many of the authorized functions under Older Americans Act III B Supportive Services align naturally with the types of services that the Aging Network can provide to older adults to contact, educate and assist them related to vaccination from COVID-19. This assistance includes, but is not limited to, information and referral/assistance lines at the state and local levels, case managers to arrange and coordinate care on a person-by-person basis, transportation programs designed for older adults and people with disabilities to get them to vaccination appointments.

Most importantly, the local agencies within the Aging Network are trusted sources of information and resources in the community—making them perfect messengers on the safety and importance of the vaccines. These efforts essentially enhance existing and future massive vaccine deployment efforts by state and local public health agencies, but in order to do this, the Aging Network will require additional federal resources.

Therefore, we urge Congress to support an additional \$200 million boost to federal investments in Older Americans Act III B Supportive Services to provide the wrap-around services that will greatly aid our national public health efforts to vaccinate older adults and family caregivers. It should be noted that this request complements the bipartisan interest in providing continued emergency funding for the OAA’s traditional programs and services, which many of the undersigned organizations also support, but the intention of this letter is to especially alert you to the need for this vaccination-related funding to also be included in the next COVID relief package.

We must also note that **prioritizing the home and community-based services direct care workforce for vaccination is also vitally important to protect vulnerable older adults who live at home and need support.** Aging Network workers, in-home care workers and all the other types of professionals working directly

with older adults and people with disabilities should be given priority access to the vaccine as soon as possible, which will enable them to more safely assist in the vaccination of and continuing care of the millions of clients we serve on a regular basis.

Congress and the Biden Administration have an incredible opportunity to turn around our nation's COVID-19 efforts and provide a unified response that meets the moment and the need. As such, **we implore Congress to rely upon and support the national Aging Network so that they can be a critical partner in ensuring that collectively we reach and vaccinate the millions of high-risk and high-needs older adults who live at home and in the community.**

Sincerely,

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Foundation of America
The Gerontological Society of America
The Jewish Federations of North America
LeadingAge
Meals on Wheels America
Medicare Rights Center
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of RSVP Directors
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Council on Aging
National Indian Council on Aging
National Senior Corps Association
Trust for America's Health

cc: House Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on Education and Labor
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html#:~:text=The%20risk%20for%20severe%20illness,people%20in%20their%2050s.>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2020/older-african-americans-coronavirus-risk.html#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20Kaiser%20Health,Blacks%20was%203.5%20times%20higher> and <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/26/us/vaccination-disparities-rollout/index.html> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/31/nyregion/nyc-covid-vaccine-race.html>.