



RI Nursing Homes are Top in Quality, are in Line with Nation in the Fight Against COVID-19 and Serve a Critical Need

The RI Health Care Association (RIHCA) today responded to Governor Gina Raimondo's comments made at the state's COVID-19 press conference on Wednesday of this week regarding nursing homes. The governor said the state will make nursing homes "better, stronger and safer," and asked that RI "innovate around long-term care." RIHCA members felt it important to address these issues and clarify the experience of RI nursing homes with the people of Rhode Island.

"RI's nursing homes are listed as number one in infection control and ranked second in quality in the nation, making us among the best, strongest and safest homes in the country," said RIHCA President and CEO Scott Fraser. *"As a state with one of the highest elderly populations in the country and third largest population of those over the age of 85, it is not a surprise that RI would be targeted by the quiet and deadly COVID-19 virus. Seventy-five hundred of RI's most ill and frail elderly are residents in our nursing homes."*

"Because of the vulnerable nature of our nursing homes, RIHCA made it a priority to have a consistent communication to the state on our concerns and need for assistance at the onset of this virus. Many requests were answered, but some critical needs were slow in coming," Fraser said.

RIHCA sent a number of letters to the state on topics of concern. First, RIHCA requested the state test hospital patients for COVID-19 before they were transferred into nursing homes for their next stage of care. The state took weeks to institute this testing policy. The insertion of untested hospital patients is what brought the first cases of COVID-19 into the nursing homes.

RIHCA also advocated for more testing and rapid results testing to be instituted into the homes. Isolating residents and workers is nearly impossible with a virus that is asymptomatic and people are left untested. This critical testing of residents and workers was slow to be implemented. Today, regular testing occurs, yet results can sometimes take between six and 10 days to come back, rendering many results unusable. In addition, nursing homes were challenged to find, access and purchase PPE – and to bid against hospitals and states– at an enormous expense. Today, the homes are getting the PPE needed, but in the initial two months, homes were in crisis.

"RI's nursing homes and our workers fought tirelessly against this virus, yet without the proper tools and support, they were climbing uphill," said Fraser. *"The homes have certainly received some monetary assistance, very small amounts of PPE and now have more regular testing, but in the initial two months of this virus, our calls for assistance were heard, but only slowly answered. These initial months had a big impact on how this virus played out in RI nursing homes."*

RI nursing homes' experience is in line with the rest of the nation

RI is not an outlier in the fight against COVID-19. Homes across the country have been struggling and many have been decimated by this virus. As of June 26, 73 percent of RI COVID-19 deaths have been "associated with" RI nursing homes. The percentage of deaths "associated with" nursing homes is relative to the total number of RI deaths (627 of 927), making the number appear high. This statistic compares to our neighbors in MA at 62 percent and CT at 73 percent. Eight percent of the 7,500 RI nursing home residents have passed due to COVID-19 related illness.

Fraser added that there are also stories of recovery, "You don't always hear the story that many residents survived COVID-19. In fact, nearly three-quarters of the 2,745 who have contracted this virus in RI's nursing homes have recovered. Our homes are celebrating these recoveries week after week."

Innovating around Long-Term Care

Governor Raimondo also spoke about "innovating around long-term care." She stated nursing homes should apply for grants for innovative solutions like single occupancy rooms and bathrooms and she also committed to investing in home care.

Fraser said, "We are willing to be at the table to discuss how we move forward with a smart continuum of care for the people of RI, yet we want to remind Rhode Islanders that we are caring for the most frail elderly in our state who in most cases need 24-7 care."

Medicaid patients account for two-thirds of nursing home residents. Since 2012, RI has cut the Medicaid budget nearly every year, forcing many homes to operate at the financial edge.

"If the Governor is willing to replenish the Medicaid budget after significant cuts and UHIP reimbursement issues, and provide more funding for single rooms and home care – this would be a welcome change."

**The most recently released U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report listed RI first in the nation for infection control and the 2019 American Health Senior Report ranked RI number two in quality. (The Providence Journal, June 8, "RI Nursing Homes Among U.S. Best.")*