



## ADVANCING EXCELLENCE

IN LONG-TERM CARE COLLABORATIVE

[AskAE@AdvancingExcellence.org](mailto:AskAE@AdvancingExcellence.org)

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September 7, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Chiquita Brooks-LaSure  
Administrator, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244

**re: Mandating COVID-19 Vaccination in Skilled Nursing Facilities**

Dear Secretary Becerra and Administrator Brooks-LaSure:

The [Advancing Excellence in Long-Term Care Collaborative](https://advancingexcellence.org/) (AELTCC) is grateful for your focus on increasing staff vaccination rates in skilled nursing facilities. AELTCC is a not-for-profit entity representing stakeholders from all sectors of post-acute and long-term care: professional and trade associations, providers, researchers, and consultants, among others. AELTCC creates a forum for organizations and individuals committed to the needs of long-term care residents and staff to discuss policies that affect these vulnerable populations.

Along with many of our AELTCC member stakeholders in our care space, we have been intensely focused on vaccine uptake efforts among staff across all post-acute and long-term care (PALTC) settings. As a result of these discussions and based on the varied and extensive experience of our membership, our board urges the Biden-Harris administration to consider some key recommendations as you develop the recently announced requirement for all nursing home staff to be vaccinated.

The Administration's mandate has the potential to dramatically advance our shared goal of getting all staff vaccinated. We would like to work closely with your staff to ensure it is implemented in an effective way to avoid staff departures from nursing homes, a disastrous outcome for our residents and families. We are already suffering from a massive nationwide direct care workforce shortage, especially nursing and front-line staff, in PALTC and other settings. A recent [survey](#) estimated that some 20% of nursing home staff may leave this setting as a result of the vaccination mandate.

Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts to improve vaccine confidence, hesitancy among our staff remains entrenched. Staff vaccination rates in nursing homes are stalled at 62% currently, and some unvaccinated staff are simply not persuadable. Even if a small number of the approximately 38% of unvaccinated nursing home staff leave, the net impact will be worse care for the residents. The loss of even one or two staff in a nursing home impacts care on certain shifts and units. The plan to implement this requirement must be done in a way that does not exacerbate the current staffing crisis.

<https://advancingexcellence.org/>

Hon. Becerra  
Hon. Brooks-LaSure  
September 7, 2021

We therefore urge the Administration to consider the following suggestions:

1. First and foremost, the President's order should at a minimum include a vaccine mandate for all Medicare- and Medicaid-certified settings, not just nursing homes. This is the only way to prevent nursing home employees from leaving to work in other settings such as assisted living, hospitals, hospices, or home health agencies, where there is no mandate.
2. Second, a requirement to demonstrate vaccination status should apply not only to the clinical teams, but to all staff coming into the buildings, including executive/administrative, housekeeping, environmental services, food service, and so forth. Additionally, we ask that CMS modify its visitation guidance to allow facilities to ask visitors about their vaccination status and/or test results and require vaccination or negative tests prior to visits. This requirement should also apply to federal and state survey inspectors and ombudsman, who can also be vectors of transmission of this dangerous virus.

Advancing Excellence welcomes the opportunity to work with the Biden-Harris administration to ensure that emerging policies and regulations incorporate clinical, ethical, and operational considerations to help improve the lives of vulnerable residents and staff in PALTC during this pandemic and beyond. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions at [bjbowers@wisc.edu](mailto:bjbowers@wisc.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Bowers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Bowers, PhD, RN  
Chair of the Board