



August 19, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, TX 78711-2428  
*Sent Electronically*

**RE: Financial Support for COVID-19 Rapid-Response Testing in Nursing Facilities**

Dear Governor Abbott,

Throughout this pandemic, your administration has directed federal CARES Act funding and state resources to support several initiatives in long term care, and your investment has enabled providers to strengthen infection control practices, virtual communications, acquire necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing resources, and continue providing quality care to their residents. Our member organizations are extremely grateful for your support.

Issues remain however, and chief among them is **testing**. In May, your directive to test all nursing facility residents and staff was an important first step to identify and contain potential outbreaks. Nursing homes and assisted living communities were further encouraged when the state's partnership with Omnicare to offer point-of care testing was announced. CMS recently announced that point-of-care testing machines would be sent to every nursing facility in the country further solidifying the importance of routine rapid testing to address this immediate crisis.

We have long advocated for adequate access to rapid testing understanding it serves as the best line of defense for our residents and staff. Access to routine testing becomes even more valuable as facilities work to meet weekly staff testing requirements in order to reunite residents with loved ones in phase one visitation. However, for many facilities, meeting this requirement is simply impossible as regular testing is unsustainable without targeted federal and state funding.

While several efforts have been made to improve testing, major barriers still exist. Access to testing through private labs and other sources remain scarce. There continues to be an apparent lack of testing capacity through Omnicare. Upon request, some providers receive no response. Others are denied testing through Omnicare for reasons unclear. For providers able to schedule, wait times may exceed one to two weeks forcing facilities to seek alternative options.

Testing does not come without a cost to providers. While Medicare and Medicaid cover most of the cost for residents, providers must absorb the remaining costs for staff members, especially as some private insurance companies refuse to cover a test that they deem 'medically unnecessary'. Furthermore, many providers are self-insured and must pay these increased costs directly. Even with investments from the CARES Act and the HHS Provider Relief fund, large gaps remain and widespread testing has become an unsustainable cost, especially as providers seek to implement recurring weekly staff testing to end isolation and prepare for any future testing requirements.



We urge you to consider allocating additional emergency funding to improve testing capacity for nursing homes and support the rising cost of testing and supplies. The HHS-provided point of care testing machines will help, but they are being distributed slowly, and with a one-time supply of test kits. Ongoing availability of test kits and staffing will be a problem.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you and the appropriate agencies to develop a sustainable, coordinated testing plan to combat COVID-19, the effects of prolonged isolation, protect older Texans, and the courageous frontline staff caring for them. We have attached a FACT SHEET further detailing the costs, need for access, and funding to support rapid-response testing in nursing homes.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Warren".

Kevin Warren  
President & CEO  
Texas Health Care Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Linial".

George Linial  
President & CEO  
LeadingAge Texas

CC: Luis Saenz, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor  
Sarah Hicks, Director of Policy and Budget, Office of the Governor  
Heather Fleming, Office of the Governor