



STATEMENT OF THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH CARE FACILITIES / CONNECTICUT CENTER FOR ASSISTED LIVING (CAHCF/CCAL) CONCERNING THE COVID-19 VACCINATION FOR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY STAFF, July 27, 2021

The Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities and the Connecticut Center for Assisted Living (CAHCF/CCAL) Board of Directors has adopted the following position statement regarding COVID-19 vaccinations for those working in long-term care facilities:

America's nursing homes, assisted living communities and other long-term care facilities have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. The development of an effective and safe vaccine has dramatically reduced COVID-19 cases and the severity of illness in long term care. However, as the highly contagious Delta variant spreads, unvaccinated individuals remain at high risk and can spread the virus to vaccinated individuals. Our residents are some of the most vulnerable individuals to the consequences of contracting COVID-19.

To protect all residents, staff and others in our communities from the known and substantial risks of COVID-19, CAHCF/CCAL strongly urges the vaccination of all health care personnel. COVID-19 vaccines protect health care personnel when working both in health care facilities and in the community. They provide strong protection against workers unintentionally carrying the disease to work and spreading it to patients and peers.

Long-term care providers have worked tirelessly to improve uptake among both residents and staff. CAHCF/CCAL, as the state affiliate of the American Health Care Association and the National Center on Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) has encouraged uptake among both residents and staff since the vaccine became available. Providers continue to work with their staff and residents to educate, offer and encourage COVID-19 vaccination. As a result, we have seen a steady increase in vaccination rates, but more needs to be done.

CAHCF/CCAL also supports all providers that adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for health care personnel, with state and local regulations and circumstances shaping whether and how these policies are implemented. The pandemic has already exacerbated workforce challenges that long-term care providers have faced for years. Vaccine mandates may further challenge providers trying to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. We renew our call for state and federal governments to enact solutions to help address these long-standing workforce challenges.

CAHCF/CCAL encourages long-term care providers who are implementing mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies to:

- Provide exemptions for medical reasons and accommodations consistent with Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines (e.g., a sincerely held religious belief, practice or observance);
- Follow relevant Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) infection control guidelines, Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements, and other federal and state regulations regarding use of personal protective equipment and other infection control practices for unvaccinated staff receiving an exemption or accommodation. For example, unvaccinated personnel may be required to wear a mask at all times even if CDC guidelines and OSHA requirements were to relax mask requirements for vaccinated personnel;

- Ensure the policy is implemented in a manner consistent with local and state laws;
- Follow requirements and guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC on which individuals are eligible and should be prioritized for vaccination;
- Monitor national safety and efficacy data for all FDA authorized or approved vaccines in use;
- Continue providing education about the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 vaccines to encourage staff to obtain the vaccine voluntarily in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner; and
- Offer scheduling flexibility and/or time off to ensure personnel have time to obtain the vaccine and recover from its possible side effects.