

## Reasons to be Hopeful in the New Year

Dear Members,

The heart and compassion that has been exhibited by all of you this year to protect and improve the lives of assisted living residents is truly inspiring. While it is tempting to reflect on the hardships and challenges of this past year, I know that we are all doing that in many ways and that what many of us are eager for at this time is real reasons for hope and optimism, so I will humbly attempt to do something different in this message, and present substantive reasons to be hopeful for the assisted living industry in 2021. Here are five reasons to be hopeful in the new year:

1. We learned so much about best practices in infection control and put them into practice, in ways that will keep residents and staff safe as we work through the pandemic, and in future public health emergencies that may arise. From safely socially distanced meals and activities, to residents wearing masks in common spaces, to screening visitors and fostering safe environments for visitation, resident care staff have made assisted living residences safer places. Mass-ALA members demonstrated how serious of a top priority this is, as our most-attended webinar ever, with over 300 live attendees, was Infection Control and Safety in Assisted Living. An updated version of that webinar will be offered, free for members on January 28, and you can register [here](#). Another webinar on the process of independent infection control audits and lessons learned through those audits is being developed for February. We have a list of six infection control audit companies, which you may contact us for if you are interested in an audit for your residence.

2. COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be safe and effective, and assisted living residents and staff will have priority access in the first phase, following a system very similar to other vaccine clinics that occur regularly in assisted living. We have had discussions with both CVS and Walgreens about the process for the federal pharmacy partnership program COVID-19 vaccine delivery in Massachusetts, and monitored state and federal news and updates for information you may need to prepare for vaccine clinics. The most recent update with all of that information is [here](#). An additional update we received since that was published is that COVID-19 vaccine clinics will begin the week of January 11 in assisted living in Massachusetts.

3. Assisted living providers have new tools for providing comprehensive care, which will help more residents in the new year. Residents have received services from nurses that allowed them to have expedited care for ongoing or emerging needs, from basic wound care to insulin and Lovenox injections, during the state of emergency. Mass-ALA continues to share stories with legislators about how these common sense health services are helping residents, and many legislators have been moved by these efforts and are advocating for the services to be allowed permanently.

At a minimum, it is cause for hope in 2021 to know that residents can receive some basic skilled care from assisted living nurses. As these stories of residents being helped by the services and the safety of offering them are more widely known, current residents can have more peace of mind and increased satisfaction, and prospective residents can be assured of their nurses' ability to care for their needs. For a refresher on this issue, view the executive order, and our guidelines for implementing skilled care.

4. Provider relief funds, funding for vaccines, testing, and tracing, were included in the federal relief package, and more help could come in future federal legislation. The federal combination omnibus and coronavirus relief package signed into law on December 27 includes \$22.4 billion for testing, contact tracing, surveillance, and mitigation. Mass-ALA will be tracking how these funds are dispersed to the state to keep you informed and advocate for funds to be allocated for COVID-19 testing of assisted living residents and staff. Additionally, over \$30 billion for vaccine distribution and administration is a part of the package, along with \$3 billion more in provider relief funds. Phase 2 and 3 provider relief payments are currently being distributed to assisted living providers, and Argentum is advocating that HHS launch a “Phase 3.5” that will address provider losses from the third quarter of 2020. Additional federal relief will be considered next year.

5. Reopening policies will continue to be adjusted based on changes in infection rates and new information. Mass-ALA has greatly appreciated working with EOE and EOHHS on their reopening working group and in helping to craft guidelines that allow for an appropriate balance between safety and quality of life. Just as the state agreed to reopen salons and allow in-unit and common space visitation as infection control and best practices evolved, we are optimistic that policy makers will continue to provide new options for safe entertainment, group activities, and visitation in assisted living as the impact of vaccines and infection control practices begins to provide greater levels of safety and comfort.

I am optimistic that more safety and an improved quality of life will be made possible for assisted living residents and staff in the new year. Thank you for your continued dedication to the assisted living industry and residents and staff.