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January 11, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

Like all Americans, AARP's 38 million members urgently want to see an end to the coronavirus pandemic. So many people, especially older Americans, have upended their lives over the past nine months. Millions of families spent the holidays away from family and friends. Over the past few months, we have been amazed, like people all over the world, at the swift pace of the development of safe and effective vaccines to fight this deadly virus. We now urge you to take immediate action to address the issues that have slowed down vaccinations across the country.

Since the start of the pandemic, nearly 95 percent of the deaths from COVID-19 have been among people 50 and older. That is why it is so important that older people be prioritized to receive these vaccines. The situation in America's nursing homes is particularly dire: although residents of long-term care facilities represent fewer than one percent of the population, residents and staff represent nearly 40 percent of the deaths.

Thanks to the efforts of Operation Warp Speed, millions of vaccine doses were already manufactured and ready to be distributed as soon as the Food and Drug Administration was able to grant emergency authorization for the vaccines. However, the supply of the vaccine does not come close to meeting the current demand. We are also concerned about distribution problems and we strongly urge you to immediately address whatever barriers may be causing these delays. Full-scale mobilization is necessary, and any slowdowns or early bottlenecks in the production and distribution systems need to be urgently addressed.

Moreover, in order to increase public awareness of vaccine allocation decisions and improve confidence in a fair distribution process, it is important that we all have access to accurate, timely, and transparent information, including how many residents and staff of long-term care facilities have been vaccinated. We appreciate the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 dashboard, but we urge you to build upon this reporting and add additional data points. Specifically, we ask that you add:



- the number and percentage of people by age, race, ethnicity, and state that have received the first or second doses of vaccine;
- the numbers and percentages of long-term care residents, by facility and state, that have received the first or second doses of the vaccine; and
- the numbers and percentages of long-term care staff, by facility and state, that have received the first or second doses of the vaccine.

It is of utmost importance that this information be updated as quickly as possible, even daily. To the extent feasible and appropriate, we suggest you consider building on existing systems and infrastructure to publicly share information. This type of reporting is not new. For example, public information is already available for families on the percentage of residents, by nursing home, who needed and received a flu shot as well as a pneumonia vaccine.

Considering the horrific death toll in America's nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, we are deeply concerned about reports that many of the staff are choosing not to be vaccinated against this virus. We urge you to focus on a strong outreach effort for front-line workers, especially since they are at such a high personal risk. We appreciate the ongoing efforts from the CDC, but more must be done to ensure that staff, residents, and their families feel confidence in this vaccine.

Finally, while there are some who are hesitant, we cannot stress enough how eager many are to receive the vaccine, which offers so much promise for a return to normalcy. We have heard so many questions from AARP members about when and how they can expect to be vaccinated, who will notify them, what information they will need to provide, and where they can sign up. Clear information on what they can anticipate and when they may have the opportunity to receive the vaccine would be of tremendous value.

One consumer tool that we urge the federal government to consider is creating an online tool that would allow consumers to use their ZIP code to search for where they can get a vaccine and what they should expect. We also strongly encourage the Administration to find ways to streamline any associated processes, such as allowing individuals to review and sign necessary forms in advance, to help reduce potential barriers to vaccinations. Finally, we urge you to pay special attention to communities that may need specific education and outreach, such as rural communities and communities of color. AARP will continue to help share this information with people as quickly as possible.

We appreciate your efforts and stand ready to work with our federal and state governments to address these challenges. Together, we can defeat this virus and ensure a bright future for Americans of all ages.

Sincerely,



Jo Ann Jenkins
Chief Executive Officer