



**LEADINGAGE'S FIVE ESSENTIAL ACTIONS NEWS CONFERENCE
REMARKS OF KATIE SMITH SLOAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO
THURSDAY, MAY 7, 11 AM by ZOOM**

Good morning. Thank you all for being here. My name is Katie Smith Sloan, and I am the president of LeadingAge. I am pleased to be joined by leaders from three of our the more than 5,000 nonprofit member organizations that provide care for older adults in every corner of the country.

We're here today because an entire generation is at risk if immediate action is not taken by policymakers to prioritize older Americans. Our older adults and those who care for them have been left to fend for themselves during the greatest pandemic our country has faced in a century.

We are alarmed to see that states are reopening without protecting older adults—even as the virus rages on. We cannot continue down this path or an entire generation will be threatened.

For weeks and weeks, a slow-motion catastrophe has been playing out in communities across the country.

At the outset of this pandemic it was clear that older adults and caregivers were at the greatest risk. But our leaders did not plan, did not listen, and did not prioritize the health and lives of older adults.

We have lost a devastating number of older Americans to this vicious virus. 8 in 10 people who have died of COVID-19 were people over 65. It is heartbreaking is that so many of these deaths could have been averted

Millions of older adults continue to live in fear as infections and death tolls climb. Brave care workers show up for work each day despite the risks and lack of supplies they need to stay safe.

Since the start of this pandemic, aging services providers-- include nursing homes --have not been able to get the PPE or testing needed to protect older Americans or their own employees.

Aging care providers are fighting and scrounging for every mask and gown they can muster. Some have resorted to wearing trash bags for protection. I talk to members every day and I've heard some providers say they are spending 1 year's worth of an ordinary year's budget in a month.

Over 50% of LeadingAge members responding to a recent online poll indicated that they expect their current supply of PPE to last two weeks or less. Of the organization reporting to have a current COVID-19 diagnosis, over 90% report being concerned about PPE.

Care providers have been crying out for help, but they've been ignored and there is no relief in sight.

Our hopes were up when we heard that FEMA was stepping in with PPE. They were soon dashed when it was announced that nursing homes would receive a grand total of two weeks worth of supplies and shipments would not be completed until sometime in July.

This is just a drop in the bucket and it overlooks the millions of vulnerable older adults in assisted living, affordable housing and other care settings.

We are at a fork in the road. Do we ignore and sacrifice the lives of older Americans by reopening without regard to the consequences? Or, do we take action now?

We're here today to call on policymakers to take that right road and act to protect our parents, grandparents and ourselves.

There are five essential actions that must be taken to protect older Americans

1. Number One: **States should not reopen without first ensuring older Americans are safe and protected.** Our most vulnerable can't be forced to compete with nail salons and gyms for life-protecting supplies on the open market.
2. Second, *all* care providers who serve older Americans need **immediate access to ample PPE.** Policymakers must prioritize aging services providers on the same priority tier as hospitals
3. Third, older adults and their care providers must have **on-demand access to rapid-results testing**, also on the same priority tier as hospitals. Results are needed in minutes, not days or weeks.
4. Fourth, we must provide **recognition for the heroic frontline workers** who are risking and sometimes losing their lives serving older Americans – just as we've recognized hospital workers and others who have kept America running.
5. Finally, saving the lives of older adults means that these promises must be kept with **real funding and support.** In its next relief package, Congress must allocate \$100 billion to cover COVID-19 needs--and provide critical support for aging services like hazard pay for frontline workers, increased loans, Medicaid funding, and federal housing assistance, and access to telehealth.

Our nation has undervalued and under-invested in older adults for too long. It didn't have to come to this. But here we are, and these five essential actions must be taken now.

I'm very pleased that we could be joined today by my colleagues and LeadingAge members to share their experience and insights.