

California Declares War on Nursing Home Residents

State Orders Nursing Homes to Admit COVID-19 patients

After weeks of warning Californians about the deadly threat the coronavirus poses to nursing home residents, the State of California has now ordered California nursing home operators to bring the virus into their facilities, knowing full well it is likely to kill many residents.

A [March 30, 2020 directive](#) from the California Department of Public Health to skilled nursing facilities states: “SNFs shall not refuse to admit or readmit a resident based on their status as a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case.”

California issued its directive while coronavirus outbreaks are spiking in dozens of nursing homes throughout the state, including Laguna Honda in San Francisco, the state’s largest facility. The state is refusing to identify nursing homes with outbreaks, cruelly leaving residents to worry that they are at immediate risk of infection and death.

COVID-19 outbreaks in Europe, the state of Washington and elsewhere have swept through nursing homes, infecting and killing large numbers of residents. The [New York Times reports today](#) that nursing homes account for one in four coronavirus deaths in New York City.

“Sacrificing the lives of beloved nursing home residents is beyond unconscionable” said Patricia McGinnis, CANHR’s executive director. “California’s directive is nothing less than a death sentence for countless residents. The State should instead look to alternative locations such as hotels and conference centers as much safer places to send COVID-19 patients for care.”

The California directive further endangers residents by waiving both minimum staffing requirements and occupancy limits for skilled nursing facilities. Cramming infected patients into crowded, understaffed facilities with extraordinarily vulnerable residents is a recipe for disaster.

By any measure, California nursing homes are dangerously unprepared for this pandemic. There are vast shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE). Nursing homes are more understaffed than ever as caregivers stay home because they are ill with the virus or caring for out-of-school children. On their best days, most nursing homes do an exceedingly poor job of keeping residents safe from common viruses.

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Moreover, California nursing homes are virtually unmonitored right now. Routine inspections and investigations have been cancelled. Most inspectors have been reassigned to desk duties. Ombudsmen are locked out of facilities as are family members, friends and other visitors who might at other times sound the alarm when residents are neglected. There are no witnesses to the suffering residents are enduring as they get sick and die alone.

The lives of people in California's nursing homes are as precious as any other. It is time for California to start treating them accordingly during this pandemic. CANHR calls on Governor Newsom to reverse the CDPH directive today before more harm is done and more lives are lost.

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March 31, 2020