



Empire State
Association of
Assisted Living

Care. Community. Connections. Every Day.



Rapid Turnaround COVID-19 Tests Can Offer Great Promise to Assisted Living Communities – But Only If Accessible and Affordable

Lisa Newcomb, Executive Director, Empire State Association of Assisted Living

During the first wave of COVID-19 in the spring of this year, Assisted Living communities across New York State reacted swiftly and comprehensively to minimize the spread of the virus within. ACF's were mandated to test all staff every week and this will likely remain in place for the foreseeable future, and at a great cost to providers.

Adult Care Facilities and Assisted Living Residences in the State of New York are required to test more than 36,000 staff members weekly. These communities are facing a testing cost of more than \$3.2 million per week for the PCR test, which average \$100 each.

The Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL) and its provider members strongly support the continued testing of staff so that their senior residents remain safe and healthy. However, the financial strain placed on them during the pandemic has restricted their ability to invest in other necessary activities such as building maintenance, improvements to technology to help keep residents and their families better connected -- and some are even facing closure. These ACFs simply cannot sustain the exorbitant weekly costs: It is breaking their backs.

Just as vaccine development continues to progress at a breakneck pace, great strides have been made in the capability to perform tests and achieve near instantaneous results. The first round of testing kits, commonly known as PCR tests, provide results in anywhere from 2 to 10 days, a long wait for ESAAL's more than 300 assisted living member communities to identify the presence of the virus and take necessary safety measures to stop its spread. Today, with advances in rapid tests, the Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card can produce results in about 20 minutes – dramatically reducing the risk of exposure for our residents and staff and at a much lower cost, around \$35 each.

The federal government has provided a limited supply of the tests to some ACFs, but it is far short of what is needed. The federal government has indicated that the US Department of Health and Human Services reviews epidemiological data on a bi-weekly basis in order to ensure tests are directed to areas with greatest need and facilities may be added to or removed from the distribution based on these data. As a result, there is not an adequate and reliable pipeline of these tests. ACFs need the state to assist us in securing a consistent supply of tests, especially as New York is now experiencing an increase in COVID-19 in some communities.

On behalf of the 30,000 senior New Yorkers who are residing in ESAAL member communities, we are calling upon New York State to provide them with a supply of the rapid Abbott tests from the State's strategic stockpile, so that we can provide the greatest level of protection and security for



our residents, their families and the hardworking, dedicated men and women who staff these residences.

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Lisa Newcomb is Executive Director of the Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL), comprised of over 300 Adult Care Facilities throughout New York State, serving more than 30,000 residents. Contact Lisa at ESAAL 518-371-2573 ext. 203.