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New York Assisted Living Communities Work with ESAAL to Make Plans for the Next Phase of Operations

Communities to Adopt a ‘New Normal’ Based on Precautions and Guidelines Adopted During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Clifton Park, NY – June 30, 2020 – The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the way adult care facilities and assisted living residences (ACF) operate, with every action made in an effort to minimize the risk of infection for residents and staff. Over the past four months, New York-based ACFs have been aggressively working with the [Empire State Association of Assisted Living](#) (ESAAL) to identify new best practices that will remain as the “new normal” as New York State ACFs plan for the anticipated reopening for outdoor visitation and community services.

“While the past four months have been challenging for ESAAL and its 300 ACF members and their residents across New York State, we are proud of the way ACFs have stepped up to the challenge,” said Lisa Newcomb, Executive Director, ESAAL. “In a matter of days, ACF’s adopted new processes to protect residents and staff, to communicate to resident friends and family who were no longer able to visit their loved ones, and for ongoing medical treatment. Today, we can look back and recognize the continued importance of working as a team, supporting each other and showing appreciation for everyone who went above and beyond for NY’s elderly.”

The new normal for NY assisted living includes:

New Ways of Communicating to Residents’ Families and Friends

Assisted living providers have always made it a priority to keep family members informed of how their loved one is doing, but the communications were typically restricted to resident-family. While that will continue so that providers can keep each family updated on the details of their own loved ones’ well-being, the COVID crisis has necessitated more general communications to all families.

Families are appreciative of the updates, the transparency they provide, and learning about the creative ways assisted living providers have kept residents engaged and active. Now that every assisted living community has a system to communicate with families regularly and on an ongoing basis, we expect these beneficial communications to continue long after COVID is no longer a threat.

Some providers have enhanced their websites to allow families to send letters, pictures and videos to their loved ones. Post-COVID, that will continue to be a great portal for a daughter or son who lives on the west coast to communicate with their loved one. Also, now that providers have become comfortable using Face Time, Zoom, and/or Skype for family communication, we expect them to continue using these forms of communication, especially for those who have limited visits with family members.

New Processes for Visitation

While the state's prohibition on visitations remains, assisted living providers hope and expect that soon visitations will begin outdoors. Ultimately, whether indoors or outdoors, assisted living providers are likely to place more focus on ensuring safe visits by pre-scheduling appointments, limiting the number of visitors at one time, and providing adequate space to allow for social distancing.

New Infection Control Policies

Universal precautions have always been taken in assisted living communities. However, the highly contagious COVID-19 virus has made staff much more sensitive to cleanliness and good hygiene. We expect the following practices to begin and/or continue:

- Employee and visitor screenings will continue. We will monitor temperatures and use a symptoms checklist upon sign-in.
- Increased use of facemasks during flu season, even for those staff that may have been vaccinated.
- Enhanced in-service trainings on infection control-related issues and awareness.
- In larger communities, some members may request approval from the NY Department of Health (DOH) to have more than one seating for meals.
- Careful and continued tracking of PPE.

Telemedicine for Medical Visits

Before COVID-19, telemedicine was used sparingly in assisted living settings. State actions to open-up telehealth's use during the pandemic has many providers using the technology in lieu of residents having to go out into the outer community. As such, residents and assisted living staff are becoming comfortable with the technology and may choose this option moving forward, especially during the cold, snowy wintery months. It will increasingly be viewed by residents as a home visit.

Click [here](#) for more information on how ESAAL and its members are doing everything possible, with the resources that are available, to slow the spread of the virus in our residences.

About Empire State Association of Assisted Living

Empire State Association of Assisted Living is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening New York State's assisted living sector and promoting the best interests of providers and residents.

Founded in 1979, ESAAL is the only association that exclusively represents the assisted living industry, serving 300 Assisted Living Residences, Adult Homes, Enriched Housing Programs and Assisted Living Programs throughout New York State. These member residences are home to more than 30,000 seniors.

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