



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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January 26, 2021

The Honorable Sara Gelser, Chair

The Honorable Dick Anderson, Vice-Chair

Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

900 Court Street NE

Salem, OR 97301

RE: Informational hearing on vaccines in Phase 1a population

Chair Gelser and members of the committee:

As the State Long Term Care Ombudsman, I am submitting this testimony in my role as Oregon's chief advocate for residents living and receiving care in licensed long-term care settings. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) program is charged in both federal and state statute with ensuring the rights of residents are protected in all long-term care facilities, including nursing facilities, residential care facilities, assisted living facilities, memory care communities and adult foster care homes.

In December, our Agency was deeply disappointed in the state's initial decision to roll-out the vaccine solely to nursing homes – thus delaying vaccines for the overwhelming majority of Oregonians living in licensed long-term care.

Oregon has been a leader nationally, for decades, in ensuring that people who meet nursing home level of care do not have to reside in an institutional setting such as a nursing home. It is extremely important to note that over 50% of the Medicaid long-term care population lives in their own home, approximately 38% in assisted living/memory care and adult foster homes and a relatively small percentage, usually around 11-12% live in a nursing facility.

We greatly appreciated the change in direction in early January that opened up Phase 1a to all individuals in licensed long-term care and beyond.

**However, opening up the Phase 1a criteria to the people we advocate on behalf of doesn't necessarily mean that they are actually receiving the vaccine.**

For assisted living and memory care, we have been told that many are being scheduled, but that information has not been forthcoming. Thus it is quite unclear to what degree residents are being vaccinated in these settings.

**Most concerning to LTCO today is that AFHs have mostly and effectively been left to themselves to coordinate with local public health programs.** Even at this stage, we are not aware of any coordinated plan to distribute vaccines to these state-licensed settings.

Based on the information shared with LTCO throughout the pandemic, approximately 10% of AFHs licensed by Aging and People with Disabilities have experienced COVID-19 in their homes. This rate of COVID is substantial enough to demand a significantly increased focus to ensure that the Oregonians living in the 1300+ AFHs licensed by ODHS-APD have the vaccine made available to them ASAP.

Please note that this is not a call to prioritize older adults in AFHs over other older Oregonians who are at significant, deadly risk should they contract the virus. Rather, this is a request for legislative oversight to ensure that our state agencies are planning and coordinating for the immediate and organized mobile delivery of vaccines to these most-at-risk populations.

Thank you for your attention to this most important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Steele". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fred Steele, MPH, JD  
State Long Term Care Ombudsman  
Director, Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman