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## Session 1220 (Symposium)

### COVID-19 IN ASSISTED LIVING: EVIDENCE ON POLICIES, PROVIDER EXPERIENCES, AND RESIDENT MORTALITY

Chair: Kali Thomas Discussant: Lindsay Schwartz

The devastating effects of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) among older adults residing in long-term care settings has been well documented. Assisted living settings in the U.S. have 811,000 residents; most are 80 years or older, and many have one or more chronic illnesses, making them highly susceptible to poor outcomes if exposed to COVID-19. This symposium highlights five studies that focus on various levels of COVID-19 response in assisted living: national organizations, states, assisted living operators and healthcare providers, and residents. The first study compares the sometimes conflicting guidance provided by national long-term care industry-related organizations and recommends assisted living-specific actions for the future. The second study describes the state regulatory response to COVID-19 in assisted living, identifying the themes and implications for the function of the care networks of assisted living residents. The third study presents findings from interviews with key stakeholders, including policymakers and industry leaders, that reflect on the challenges responding to changing recommendations and policies. The fourth study reports results from a survey with administrators and medical and mental health care providers who treat their residents that illustrates the care practices that were implemented in response to COVID-19 in assisted living. The fifth presentation documents the national excess assisted living resident mortality that was attributable to COVID-19. This symposium culminates with a leading assisted living industry expert reflecting on providers' experiences and posing areas to consider when preparing for and responding to future pandemic events in assisted living settings.

### COVID-19 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSISTED LIVING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Similar to nursing homes, COVID-19 has challenged assisted living (AL), given its congregate nature and vulnerable residents. However, COVID-19 recommendations have not consistently recognized differences between nursing homes and AL, and in so doing present implications for the future of AL. This project examined COVID-19 recommendations from six key organizations and compared them across nursing homes and AL. Differences include recommending more flexible visitation and group activities for AL, while similarities suggest that AL may best integrate health care into offered services (e.g., work with consulting clinicians who know residents and the AL community). Primary points to be discussed are that COVID-19 may accelerate

the closer coordination of social work and medical care into AL, because recommendations suggest AL would benefit from the services and expertise of nurses, social workers, and physicians. There seems to be an unmet need to mitigate loneliness in AL, which warrants specific attention moving forward.

### STATE REGULATORY RESPONSE TO COVID-19 LIMITED ASSISTED LIVING RESIDENT CAREGIVER NETWORKS

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This paper describes a qualitative content analysis of assisted living emergency rules, revised regulations, and executive orders responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using key search terms, we identified 36 states that enacted policies between February and October 2020. The following themes occurred most frequently: testing, infection control, access restrictions, suspension of requirements, and reporting. The convoys of care model recognizes internal, external, formal, and informal caregivers as essential members of an AL resident's care network. We found that non-staff care providers, including external formal caregivers (e.g. home health and hospice) and informal caregivers (e.g. family), were most often addressed in policies limiting access. Informal caregivers were the least often specifically addressed in these policies. Given the importance of these network members in the AL context, these policies have implications for the wellbeing of the resident and care network.

### COVID-19 RESPONSE IN U.S. ASSISTED LIVING SETTINGS: KEY STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

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Unique regulatory requirements and scope of services within assisted living (AL) pose distinctive challenges to COVID-19 response. To identify COVID-19 issues specific to AL, we recruited stakeholders with expertise in AL operations, policy, practice, and research (n=42) to participate in remote interviews between July and September 2020. Using thematic analysis, we derived the following overarching themes: 1) Policymakers lack an understanding of the AL context; 2) AL administrators were left to coordinate guidelines with little support; 3) AL organizations faced limited knowledge of and disparate access to resources; 4) State-level regulatory requirements conflicted with COVID-19