

Introduction

Lessons Learned From Coronavirus Disease 2019 Recovery: Policy Implications for the Health and Well-Being of Older Adults

Deb Bakerjian, PhD, APRN, FAAN, FAANP, FGSA^{1*} and An Nguyen, OTD, OTR/L²

¹Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, University of California Davis, Sacramento, USA. ²Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, California, USA

*Address correspondence to: Deb Bakerjian, PhD, APRN, FAAN, FAANP, FGSA, 2570 48th St., Administrative Services Building Room 2852, Sacramento, CA 95817, USA. Email: dbakerjian@ucdavis.edu

The Health Sciences section of the Gerontological Society of America was invited to organize this issue of the *Public Policy & Aging Report* (PPAR). The Health Sciences leadership team discussed many potential topics, but recognized that the past few years have challenged organizations and communities in multiple ways as they sought to manage the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic more competently, particularly how the virus impacted older adults. During this time, scores of global scientists and health providers worked on ways to better manage acutely ill COVID-19 patients with new medications and treatment techniques, while public health initiatives aimed to prevent spread of the virus through vaccinations. Despite these efforts, we could not anticipate the impact the pandemic would have on individuals, families, health-care organizations, communities, and regions throughout the world. It certainly raised the question of how we move forward.

This issue of PPAR focuses on COVID-19 recovery and public policy implications of lessons learned across the care continuum for older adults. In calling for papers, we emphasized the importance of policy issues and proposed solutions coming from the perspective of what matters to older adults, their families, and care partners. We have selected the six manuscripts that best embraced these goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in many ways, brought the world closer together as the virus spread across the globe and impacted almost all countries. Yet, there were many cases where the unintended consequences of well-meaning policies and regulations negatively impacted individuals and communities. We start with a study from Zanwar and

colleagues (2022), who examined the impacts of COVID-19 mitigation policies on the health outcomes of older adults living in six middle- and high-income countries. Their study investigated reasons for variations in COVID-19 responses and emphasized favorable and unfavorable policies for older-adult well-being.

The next paper focuses on another often-understudied population of caregivers. Fields and colleagues (2022) conducted a scoping review to collect both positive and negative aspects of COVID-19-related policies on caregivers across the world. The authors identify key priority areas for improving caregiving policies, with a special emphasis on technology and caregiver training to better support caregivers of older adults, and suggest that policymakers need to focus on developing caregiver-centered policies.

Using data from a nationally representative survey of U.S. households, Mathis and Rooks (2022) describe regional differences in COVID-19 vaccination rates among older adults in the United States. Their study highlights that many older adults in the United States remain unvaccinated, with significant differences by geographic region. Disparities were also observed for older adults from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds. They discuss the need for targeted policies to address older adults' vaccine hesitancy and misinformation regarding vaccines.

At the community level, Koszalinski and colleagues (2022) explored the phenomenon of social isolation among older adults residing in nursing homes during the pandemic. Through engaging local community stakeholders—including nursing home administrators, nursing directors, and frontline

nursing staff—in interviews, the authors elucidated themes relating to the challenges of addressing social isolation in this setting. They recommend policy solutions, including the use of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a framework to guide future policy change (Maslow, 1970).

The final two papers describe the impacts of COVID-19 on specialized organizations that are often ignored as most researchers focus on more mainstream organizations. The first study, from Ham (2022), examines the impacts of the pandemic on small residential care facilities with eight or fewer residents. This qualitative paper describes key challenges and differences in COVID-19-related policies across states within the United States and how the staff in these care facilities lacked the knowledge and resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Lastly, Kheirbek and Beamer (2022) put forth a call to action for state and federal policymakers to address the growing needs of incarcerated older adults in U.S. prisons. The authors reflect on lessons learned from the pandemic, during which cramped prison environments posed a major public health hazard as frequent sites of COVID-19 outbreaks. They call for prisons' compassionate release policies to be strengthened to address the needs of incarcerated older adults and their families.

The authors contributing to this issue of PPAR remind us of the far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on older adults, their families, care partners, and the organizations that care for them. In the context of an aging population in the United States and in other nations worldwide, the lessons learned from navigating the COVID-19 pandemic cannot sit idle but, rather, they must be translated into stronger public health policy changes to improve the health and well-being of older adults.

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