



## **EYES FORWARD. OPEN HEART.**

### **Our Gratitude to You. Our Message to Minnesota.**

It has been five weeks since COVID-19 came into our lives – five weeks that for many of you probably seem like a lifetime. As new information and guidance pours in nearly every day, I know you have been working with a profound sense of urgency to keep your residents safe and to ensure that their lives, even without visits from family or opportunities to engage in the day-to-day activities of community, are full of love and human connection.

You are more than caregivers. You are sources of hope, constancy and well-being for all who reside with you.

Despite Minnesota's relative success in slowing the spread of COVID-19, we are witnessing increasing infection and entering a more deadly phase for our vulnerable populations. With community spread and in the absence of the widescale testing we so desperately need, the number of confirmed cases in our member communities is growing and some of our members are battling more pervasive outbreaks.

These outbreaks underscore the insidious way in which this highly contagious virus spreads, with as many as half of those afflicted showing no symptoms in the early phases of infection. We have seen how in just one day a care setting with an outbreak can lose so many of its staff to quarantine as to threaten its ability to function without state intervention.

We have also seen the courage, dedication and faithfulness of your staff. So too have strong partners who help elevate the needs of senior care, including Commissioner of Health Malcolm, who recently said, *"Without the care and support of the staff who are working with them (seniors), we are going to have an additional crisis on our hands. It's incumbent on all of us to understand that these facilities are working very hard to protect our residents and their staff, and we continue to work very closely with them to do everything possible to prevent the introduction and spread of the virus."*

But more and more in the national media and even here in Minnesota, we also see news reports that seek to place unfair blame on providers for coronavirus illness and deaths. Those stories are sometimes side by side with more positive stories of our residents and staff, but we are stepping up with additional public messaging.

These are the messages that you will see from us in the coming days:

# OUR MESSAGE TO MINNESOTA

# 1

## RESPECT

Just as doctors and nurses and emergency responders are on the frontline for Minnesota as it battles this virus, so too are our nursing assistants, nurses, home care aides, housekeepers, dietary staff and other workers who don't appear on camera or in newspapers. They come to work every day when staying at home would be safer. They put their own lives at risk because they love their work – because it is more than a job, it is a calling.

# 2

## DIGNITY

We grieve for every older adult who has succumbed to this deadly virus. They are beloved mothers and fathers, grandparents, and veterans to whom we have grown close and had the honor of serving as we accompanied them on a path for a life well-lived.

# 3

## SUPPORT

We are part of the solution for battling this virus and we are up to the task. But we need help and support – especially priority for testing of asymptomatic workers and basic infection control tools of facemasks and gowns. Support us in our critical, life-saving work – we will be there for your loved ones in all the ways you need us to be.

These are stressful days, but they are also days filled with purpose. Please don't lose sight that there will be a time when this global pandemic is in our past -- when families having to converse with their relatives through windows is a distant memory. when final farewells can be exchanged as they are meant to be - with touch and companionship, and when the hallways and gathering places of our communities ring again with a choir of voices and the sounds of everyday comings and goings.

In the meantime, I am lifted up by the everyday victories against this terrible illness – the caregivers who find a way to bring joy with them to work, the creativity, resourcefulness and collaboration in the face of problems we have never had to solve before, and a sense of purpose that has never been stronger. It reminds us all why we answered the call to be caregivers in the first place.

With eyes forward and an open heart, we at LeadingAge Minnesota express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to you.



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