



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

www.retiredamericans.org

Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

March 13, 2020

Long Term Care Facilities Face Unique Challenges With Coronavirus

[Nursing homes around the country are trying](#) to prepare for the increased risk their residents face from the coronavirus outbreak as it spreads nationally.

Along with everyone else, many nursing homes have struggled to adequately test patients and staff for the coronavirus and scan visitors for symptoms. Access to test kits has been limited, and nurses have expressed concerns about staff shortages and having too little protective equipment. Many [facilities have been stockpiling equipment](#), while others have reported difficulties in getting masks and gowns.

"We are concerned about our seniors wherever they are," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, Alliance President. "The triple threat of age, underlying health conditions, and close living quarters increases the risk that people face in long term care facilities. Please call your relatives to check on them and let them know you care."

The Alliance has gathered [information](#) on how retirees can manage the coronavirus crisis. Recommendations include washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; having extra necessary medications on hand; and avoiding crowds as much as possible. The AFL-CIO has compiled guidance [for all ages](#).

Medicare Expanding Telemedicine to Help Deal with Coronavirus



An [\\$8.3 billion emergency funding bill](#) to combat the coronavirus, signed into law last week, will allow Medicare to expand the use of telemedicine. In areas with an outbreak, [Medicare can use telemedicine](#) to reduce the risk of infection among beneficiaries and provide timely medical advice.

Telemedicine refers to the practice of caring for patients remotely when the provider and patient are not physically present with each other. Until now Medicare has limited telemedicine to patients in rural areas

with little access to specialists. The emergency spending bill will allow Medicare to waive these restrictions to help keep seniors safe during the pandemic.

While patients will still have to be physically tested for COVID-19 in a clinic or doctor's office, telemedicine will enable doctors to make special arrangements to safely receive patients who are suspected of having the illness. This will protect health care workers and other patients from being unknowingly exposed.

Telemedicine will also allow Medicare beneficiaries to be treated for routine health conditions during the outbreak. Since seniors tend to need more doctors' appointments, they will be able to access their doctor without the danger of coming into contact with an infected person.

"Telemedicine will be important in containing the spread of this virus and protecting seniors who are at risk," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "But we must also make sure any vaccine and drugs that are developed in the coming months to prevent and treat this virus are affordable. Drug corporations must not price gouge when the stakes are this high."

An Alarming Inequality Gap Materializes After 65

An [analysis from demographer Samuel Preston](#) of the University of Pennsylvania shows that seniors in American urban areas and on the coasts are surviving longer than their counterparts in rural areas and the nation's interior.

This geographic gap in life expectancy for older Americans has been widening since 2000; seniors in rural areas have seen smaller improvements than those in large metro areas as longevity has increased nationally. In particular, older Americans in Appalachia and the East South Central region, such as Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, have fared worse than those on the coasts.

The geographic differences emerged around 1999-2000 and widened from 2000 to 2016, the study found. By the end of this period, life expectancy at age 65 for women in large metropolitan areas was 1.63 years longer than for those in rural areas. For men, the gap was 1.42 years.

According to the study, the most important factor in living longer has been a reduction in deaths from cardiovascular illnesses, such as heart attacks and strokes — the biggest killer in America.

"It's likely that medical treatments for cardiovascular disease have disseminated more rapidly in large metro areas than in rural areas," which have fewer specialist physicians and hospitals, Preston said.

There are large differences in smoking rates across the country, and while the analysis didn't examine race, income or education, demographers are certain that these factors play a part in the findings.

"Researchers are also sure that Medicare and Social Security have been key factors in the overall upward trend for life expectancy since 1950," said Alliance Secretary-Treasurer **Joseph Peters, Jr.** "Expanding those programs would go a long way toward helping seniors in areas where increases in longevity have lagged, such as Appalachia and the South."

Have You Heard? A Valuable Benefit for Alliance Members

Alliance members and their extended families can take advantage of discounts up to 70% off the Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price on hearing aids purchased through the Alliance's partnership with [Hear In America](#). Three years of follow-up care and loss-and-damage coverage are included.

Gerontologists and senior advocates consider hearing aids necessary medical treatment. Recent studies have found that hearing loss is linked to dementia and cognitive decline, making it more important than ever to have your hearing checked. Other studies have shown that untreated hearing loss is directly related to faster brain shrinkage, depression, and falls.

Research conducted by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health showed that older adults with untreated hearing loss pay much more in total health care costs over time, averaging 46% more in expenses than people who did not have hearing loss.

To arrange a FREE hearing screening and evaluation, contact Hear In America today and find out if hearing aids would benefit you. For more information or to register, call 1-800-286-6149 or go to www.hearinamerica.com/ara.

The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well-being of over 4.4 million retirees and their families.