

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Becerra:

Thank you for your work thus far to get Americans vaccinated against COVID-19. Across the US we are facing new challenges in the form of variants that put communities with high concentrations of unvaccinated persons at even greater risk for serious COVID-19 illness. This makes our efforts to boost vaccination rates all the more imperative, especially among vulnerable populations like seniors and communities of color.

We are especially concerned about low rates of vaccination among nursing home residents in Nevada. As of July 14, 2021, only 61% of Nevada nursing home residents were reported as fully vaccinated – the lowest rate of any state.¹ As you know well, nursing homes have been susceptible to COVID-19 outbreaks that seriously endanger the health of both residents and staff. Since the start of the pandemic, more than half of nursing home residents and staff across Nevada tested positive for COVID-19, resulting in more than 500 deaths across the state.² The combination of low vaccination rates, high rates of COVID-19 in Nevada, and the emergence of variants could create a uniquely dangerous situation for our state's nursing homes.

To help us better understand this situation and the work that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is doing to remedy it, we respectfully request answers to the following questions:

- Does HHS have an explanation for the lag in vaccination rates among nursing home residents in Nevada relative to other states?
- What is HHS doing to provide outreach and education to nursing home residents and their loved ones on why they should be vaccinated?
- The American Rescue Plan Act included two policies supporting nursing homes: enhanced technical assistance to facilities through Medicare's Quality Improvement Organizations, and funding for the deployment of strike teams to hotspot facilities. Have these programs gone into effect? If so, is there a role for these entities in boosting vaccination rates among nursing home residents?

¹ [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#)

² [State of Nevada Department of Health and Human Services Office of Analytics](#)

- In May, HHS concluded the Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program after pharmacy partners completed three site visits to each enrolled facility. What is HHS doing to ensure that skilled nursing facilities understand what their options are for vaccinating residents now that the program has ended, including having additional on-site vaccinations available? Are all facilities served by at least one long-term care pharmacy that is enrolled as a vaccine provider in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program?

We appreciate the urgency with which HHS has approached the task of vaccinating Americans. These efforts have enabled communities to reopen and get back to work, and they've saved lives. We know now that the US vaccination program prevented approximately 279,000 additional deaths and up to 1.25 million additional hospitalizations.³ We look forward to working with you to get more shots in arms and continue to avoid preventable tragedies moving forward.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States

³ [Commonwealth Fund](#)