



## Open Letter to New Yorkers

New Yorkers are facing a tragic, constantly changing battlefield in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and our long-term care facilities are at the center of this conflict. COVID-19 literally targets nursing home residents: the frail, elderly and people with multiple medical conditions who live together under one roof. Unfortunately, no one — not nursing homes, other health care providers or the government — was able to foresee the magnitude of this pandemic. We stand with our grieving communities and staff, and share our deepest condolences with the families who have lost loved ones. We will never forget those lost to this pandemic, nor the heroic staff who have bravely remained on the front lines to help protect the most vulnerable in our society from such a ferocious and deadly foe. We are also grateful for Governor Cuomo's leadership at this critical time.

At Isabella Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing Care, a 705-bed not-for-profit caring for seniors in upper Manhattan, we're committed to providing compassionate, quality care through this challenge, just as we have for the past 145 years. Since the initial outbreak in March, the country has learned more about this virus — how it can be present in those who are asymptomatic, how easily it is spread and how prevalent it was long before anyone knew — which has been critical to understanding its impact on nursing home residents and curbing its spread going forward. Based on what we've learned, we believe there are four important recommendations that should be implemented:

- 1. Nursing homes must have a seat at the table.** In addition to the obvious vulnerability of our residents, we are the only ones who can speak with firsthand knowledge about how this pandemic has impacted nursing homes, their residents and staff. Nursing homes are a critical part of the health care continuum. All nursing homes — especially not-for-profits — should be key stakeholders participating in future planning for this and the next health care crisis, as well as a resilient health care system.
- 2. Nursing homes desperately need increased funding to adequately care for society's most vulnerable population.** The pandemic has devastated the financial condition of nursing homes, and especially not-for-profit homes, which already faced significant financial challenges prior to the pandemic. Nursing homes, excluded from any sizable federal funding for the pandemic, are in dire need of substantial national funding in the short term, to help protect our residents and staff during this pandemic, and improved Medicaid and Medicare rates in the long term, to sustain quality care and uphold heightened infection control measures. Funding long-term care facilities is key to curbing the spread of the virus, as well as protecting vulnerable residents and staff — and we need the support of President Trump and the New York State Congressional Delegation to help make that happen.
- 3. All nursing homes should have access to testing and stockpiles of PPE.** Like all other nursing homes in New York City and elsewhere throughout the state, Isabella had very limited access to in-house testing, inhibiting our ability to swiftly diagnose our residents and staff. In recognition of the critical need, the State is now prioritizing continued access to testing for New York nursing homes. In addition, while we have PPE for our staff, nursing homes, along with the hospitals, need to be covered by the Governor's mandate to have 90-day stockpiles of PPE so we can be prepared for future outbreaks.
- 4. All New York long-term care facilities should report accurate COVID-19 data to the Department of Health.** From the beginning of this pandemic, Isabella has reported complete and accurate data to the Department of Health, sharing daily the number of confirmed and presumed positive cases at the nursing home, including deaths. All nursing homes in New York State should provide complete and accurate COVID-19-related data to the Department of Health in a timely matter. It is critical that epidemiologists have comprehensive data so they can effectively advise how to combat this virus should it return, as well as future pandemics. In the long term, rooting future planning and decision-making in this data will provide the best protection for the residents and staff of long-term care facilities.

Isabella and nursing homes across the country will continue to play a critical role in our health care system. To meet this challenge, it is clear that this nation must transform how we view and financially support nursing homes as dedicated providers of essential care for the most vulnerable among us.

Isabella has 145 years of experience, which now includes fighting this horrific pandemic. We are ready to lead the way, and hope that our colleagues in the industry and elected officials, at all levels, will join us.

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