



Kansas Nursing Homes Are Filled With Love and Dedication. Here's What Else We Need to Fight This Pandemic

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Each day, journalists invite us to view heartbreaking scenes playing out in hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living communities as the coronavirus spreads across our state. We will never get used to seeing families conversing through nursing home windows with relatives who can no longer receive visitors... hospital workers who are hardly able to speak through their physical and emotional exhaustion... final farewells exchanged via Facetime... funeral services attended from cars.

Each COVID-19 case, and each elder included in the death counts announced daily by Governor Kelly, represents a treasured person. These victims were husbands and wives, veterans, farmers, retired teachers, and even health care professionals. They were Chiefs super-fans, Royals lovers, and beloved family patriarchs or matriarchs who nurtured children and grandchildren over many years. Tragically, their age and underlying health conditions also made them more likely to contract COVID-19 and to develop serious, often deadly, complications.

We grieve for every older adult who has succumbed to this deadly virus. So do the dedicated caregivers who work inside our state's nursing homes.

These nurses, aides, housekeepers, cooks, and other workers don't appear on camera or in newspapers. But they are hurting. They grieve every time this virus takes away an older adult whom they have served, and to whom they have grown close, over many years.

These caregivers come to work every day, when staying at home would be so much safer. They put their lives, and their own families, at risk because they love their work. They feel called to help residents fight this virus so they can continue living meaningful lives long after this pandemic becomes a distant memory.

In light of this dedication, it is disappointing to see news reports that blame America's nursing homes for coronavirus deaths. That blame is misplaced and unfair.



Let's start with the facts. There are many reasons, documented by experts, why COVID-19 spreads so quickly within nursing homes. By design, these care settings are home to a high concentration of older adults with serious underlying health conditions who live in a communal environment and require hands-on assistance with basic activities of daily living like dressing and bathing.

This combination of factors helps the coronavirus spread and makes the virus extremely challenging to control, even for nursing homes that have honed their infection-control and prevention protocols during scores of influenza seasons.

Nursing homes also face additional challenges that are out of our control:

- We need personal protective equipment—including masks, gowns, and gloves—so we need to keep our caregivers safe.
- We need access to critical testing tools that would help us identify and isolate staff and residents who have been exposed to the virus.
- We need adequate funding that actually covers the true cost of the care we provide.

This trifecta of need—for equipment, testing, and funds—has put nursing homes at a distinct disadvantage during this health emergency. We simply haven't been given the tools we need to fight COVID-19.

The coronavirus pandemic is a clarion call for change. Now is the time to support nursing homes, give them the resources they sorely lack, and recognize their important role in the health care system.

Now is the time for clinicians across the health care system—in hospitals, nursing homes, and public health departments—to work in collaboration, not in opposition, for the good of our grandparents, parents, and, someday, ourselves.

It's not too late for Kansas to change. But we cannot delay.