

July 1, 2020

It's past time the White House and Congress required, and funded, comprehensive Covid testing in nursing homes

Karl Polzer, [Center on Capital & Social Equity](#)

What wasn't said at last week's [Congressional hearings on Covid-19](#) should raise alarm. [Federal officials testified](#) that they plan to issue "more targeted" testing "guidelines" for states and nursing homes. More advice is not enough. After five months and more 120,000 virus deaths, lack of federal and state action -- and adequate funding -- for testing in nursing homes is homicide by negligent policy. Meanwhile, the tragicomic opera of 'who said what about testing' continued on the Congressional stage.

We know that regular testing of staff and residents in long term care facilities must be done to control the spread and lethal impact of the virus. In May, [President Trump said testing in nursing homes was critically important and that he would mandate it if necessary](#). He added that many governors had been "lax" in this regard. Since then, [industry and insurers continue haggling over the cost](#).

The first wave of coronavirus is still surging. States that reopened, including Texas and Florida, have reversed course and partially shut down. Public health officials predict a resurgence during the next flu season.

The White House and Congress must wait no longer to make sure there's regular testing of all nursing home workers and residents and pay for it. [Bulk purchasing](#) by the federal government could improve testing speed and drastically reduce its cost – which would be minimal even at today's prices compared to the \$7 trillion hit the country already has absorbed from the pandemic. Upwards of half of virus deaths are related to [nursing homes](#) and other long-term care settings. Focusing national resources on hot spots like these is not only the right thing to do. It's also a key slowing down the virus' spread and opening the economy.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. epidemiologist to see that more forceful action is needed now. What's the problem? Could it really be the money? Or is it that

Americans and their political leaders don't care that much about protecting frail [old people](#) and the low-wage workers providing their care?