

## **The Toll COVID-19 Takes on Residents, Families & Staff**

As we have seen in the outbreak in Washington state, nearly half of all residents infected were hospitalized and approximately 20-25% died. While we are seeing similar widespread outbreaks in some facilities, others are experiencing only a small number of residents infected. Regardless, long term care staff need to prepare for residents becoming ill with COVID-19, possibly needing hospitalization, and unfortunately for some residents, succumbing to the virus. You can take the following steps to help prepare.

### **Conversations with Residents & Families**

- Make sure their advance directives are up to date and contain correct contact information.
- Also take this opportunity to discuss if their end-of-life wishes have changed or not.
- Educate them on the risks and benefits of hospitalizations. This should include what it means if a hospital surge is happening, which may mean care in hallways, emergency rooms, or temporary holding areas such as gyms or parking lots.
- Ensure Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) orders, documented wishes, physician orders are all consistent with resident wishes.

### **Conversations & Preparation with Staff**

- Prepare your staff for anticipated increase in resident hospitalizations and deaths
  - Organize grief support for families and staff.
  - Engage hospice supports where possible.
  - If possible, dedicate a room for staff and a room for families to step away and have private time to pause and process.
- Anticipate increased visitation of immediate family members/individuals of choice to see resident when end-of-life is imminent.
  - Continue screening anyone coming into the building and offer them PPE.
  - Consider accommodations for family who may want to stay overnight with a resident near end-of-life, while minimizing exposure to other residents or staff.
- Anticipate the impact of increased demand for mortuary services on your facility
  - Consider how to manage any deceased individuals if you cannot get a timely response from the mortuary to transport out of the facility.
  - Refresh staff on processes for communication and documentation with various parties (jurisdictional medical examiner/coroner), steps necessary when residents die, and make modifications where needed in event of a high volume of deaths within a short timeframe.

Staff in long term care are well experienced in taking care of people at end-of-life. It is important to refresh and reinforce those skills to provide quality care and supports for each resident and their family.