



aarp.org/or | oraarp@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpor
facebook.com/AARPOregon

**Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery
Testimony from Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations
Informational Meeting: COVID-19 Vaccination Phase 1a Population:
Update on progress, barriers and successes
January 26, 2021**

AARP Oregon, on behalf of our 503,000 Oregon members and all older Oregonians, appreciates the opportunity to bring our perspective forward regarding the vaccination roll-out in Oregon around the Phase 1A population, with special attention to the 50-plus population.

Since the start of the pandemic, nearly 95% of the deaths from COVID-19 have been among people 50 and older. And in Oregon, 91% of all COVID-19 deaths are among people 60 and older. The data clearly shows that the older people are, the higher risk they face if they contract COVID-19.

AARP supports the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommendations, which have prioritized the 65 and older population, and we urge a **renewed focus** on this population moving forward.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) reported that those in congregate care settings have suffered the greatest loss. Throughout the pandemic the residents of long-term care facilities have continually represented more 50% of the deaths in Oregon. As of January 21, over 1008 Oregonians residing in long-term care have died from COVID-19.

When it comes to Phase 1A, we welcome the news that all 130 nursing facilities have been partnered with a participating pharmacy and vaccinations are proceeding. But, as ODHS also reports, we have a crisis when it comes to Adult Foster Homes. We are deeply concerned that less than 15% of licensed Adult Foster Homes have been enrolled in this program, months into the registration process. **We urge all resources available be used to address this failure.**

Phase 1A also includes Oregonians receiving in-home care and their paid or unpaid caregiver. Oregon is a national leader in in-home and community-based services and supports. Older Oregonians are supported by nearly 500,000 unpaid family caregivers who help with activities of daily living, medical support, trips to medical facilities and more – receiving services traditionally provided in some congregated care settings. Based on 2017 data, unpaid family



caregivers make up 11% of our population. More than 1 in 10 of us provide caregiving to a loved one.

While in good times we can embrace Oregon's leadership in community-based care. During this pandemic we are in a crisis with Oregonians receiving care at home who have not been adequately provided for in Phase 1A even though they are included. And we would add to that the need to recognize the impact of COVID-19 on older BIPOC and houseless Oregonians, who represent some of our most vulnerable older Oregonians.

Here at AARP, we have **heard** from our members. A nice way of framing their message is they are *deeply* troubled by the choices and direction Oregon is going. We recognize the complicated nature of these issues but moving forward, Oregon should rely on the science and guidance of the CDC to provide vaccines to those most likely to die from COVID-19.

In regards to Phase 1A, here are a few things we have heard are working from those in the community:

- Some counties have worked independently with the long-term support services network in order to try to make navigation easier. For example, Multnomah County, Public Health, the County and regional hospital networks are working to inform consumers how to be vaccinated with the Convention Center vaccine site.
- Marion County has worked very well with the long-term care network to provide outreach and access to vaccines for those residents via the State Fairgrounds.
- Tillamook County is offering to bring the vaccine to consumers who are not able to go to a clinic. This is a critical strategy because having to stand in line at a clinic or travel to one can be a large barrier for individuals.

Moving forward to complete Phase 1A as well as to proceed to Phase 1B and onward, we urge that:

- The barriers to providing vaccines to adult foster care residents and staff, adults who have a medical condition or disability and receive in-home services and paid and unpaid caregivers be immediately addressed and resolved. This needs to include strategies for those who cannot travel to a clinic.
- There is coordination with local health authorities to ensure broad-based access to vaccines especially in our most vulnerable communities by establishing numerous access points such as large accessible venues, retail pharmacy, smaller mobile clinics, doctors' offices, in-home visits as well as other strategies employed across the country, using lessons learned.
- A robust system be established for Oregonians to learn about and how to access vaccines, since we know the interest is high and the resources limited. Again, we should utilize lessons learned to date here and across the country.

We appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today and thank you for consideration of our concerns. AARP Oregon stands ready to help.

