

My name is Peter Wilhelm and I have worked in the long term care (LTC) industry in Oregon for more than five years. I work closely on a daily basis with seniors and their families when a senior needs a higher level of care, guiding them through the process of identifying appropriate types of long term care and assisting them throughout the transition and move.

Without question, the pandemic and resulting intense visitation restrictions and internal contact restrictions within senior living have been traumatic for residents and their loved ones. Of course, some amount of disruption is unavoidable in this kind of situation but vigorous planning and preparation surely can assist in safely mitigating the degree of that disruption.

To no fault of its own, this unpreparedness by the LTC industry became an especially poignant deficit when it came to dementia residents who are typically unable to understand the concept of, or participate in, a video call - or to even process what was happening and why they were suddenly left alone without access their family. All of us who work in LTC have seen firsthand how this forced isolation devastated families and caused trauma for the senior residents. The Oregonian today (<https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2021/02/hundreds-of-large-senior-care-homes-yet-to-receive-coronavirus-vaccine-despite-browns-erroneous-claims-to-the-contrary.html>) detailed the experience of one local family with a loved one in memory care; the son shared that he has only seen his 80 year old father with dementia one time in the last year.

My company belongs to an industry group called the Oregon Senior Referral Agency Association (<https://osraa.com/>). We at OSRAA identified a gap early in the pandemic and pooled our resources to begin donating tablets to communities. To date OSRAA has donated more than 50 tablets to communities in Oregon, with a focus on Medicaid-friendly communities, specifically to help facilitate virtual visits between residents and loved ones.

The reality is, however, that access to technology itself isn't a solution; rather, having a required plan in place for trained staff able to provide a consistent level of virtual communication combined with dedicated technology is needed – likewise, plans to mitigate isolation within communities should be required just as plans to address other emergencies such as fires and earthquakes are.

Combatting the real physical and emotional dangers of isolation is a crucial value of the LTC world. We have experienced what happens without planning and we owe to ourselves and our families to see that it does not happen again. This bill is a good start.