

Rep. Chris

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Senior Report



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New pandemic protections for long-term care residents

News around the country has been highlighting the grim toll COVID-19 has taken on many long-term care and nursing home facilities, and data from our own Pennsylvania facilities sadly corresponds with the national statistics.

It shows that nearly 70% of the approximately 7,000 Pennsylvanians who have died from COVID-19 – more than 4,500 seniors – were residents of nursing or personal care facilities.

My colleagues and I are working with the state to combat this disturbing trend. One helpful development is the recent appropriation of \$175 million in CARES Act funding to help better protect residents and the staff who care for them.

The newly launched Regional Response Health Collaboration Program will draw on teams of professionals from hospitals and university medical centers throughout the state.

Working together with facility staff, they will expand COVID-19 testing, including testing of asymptomatic staff and residents; implement contact tracing and best practices for infection control; support clinical care through on-site and telemedicine services; and provide remote monitoring and consultation with physicians.

The grant funding for the collaborative program is just one component of a spending bill my colleagues and I passed in late May, allocating more than \$690 million in federal CARES Act dollars to improve the pandemic response in long-term care programs.

The new infusions of funding and resources will better prepare our facilities, programs and staff as they work to protect our most vulnerable residents.



Enjoying the company at the 2019 Duca Degli Abruzzi Picnic.



Joining some of our community's fit seniors at the Challenges 7th Annual Senior Fitness Walk at Cascade Park last year.

Check out the Department of Aging's COVID-19 resource guide

The state Department of Aging offers a comprehensive resource – the COVID-19 Resource Guide for Older Adults – providing a wealth of information on meals, prescriptions, protective services, scams to watch out for and tips on how to stay active and connected. Visit the department's website at www.aging.pa.gov to find the guide.

Seniors: Watch for these scams targeting Property Tax/Rent Rebate recipients, Medicare beneficiaries

The best way to beat scammers at their own game is to stay one step ahead of them. You can do that by understanding the latest schemes and reporting them if you're targeted. Here are a few recent ones:

Property Tax/Rent Rebate scam

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue recently issued a warning about a scam targeting seniors receiving rebates through the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program.

The scam involves a call from someone claiming to work for the department. The caller says that the senior's application for the PTRR program has been approved, asks if they would like the rebate directly deposited into a bank account, and then requests their bank account number.

Although the department does contact applicants via automated calls to confirm that their information has been received and approved, the department does NOT collect an applicant's banking information over the phone. Instead, if the department needs additional information, it will send a letter through the mail.

COVID-19 scams

Recently, scammers are calling or emailing Medicare beneficiaries offering to provide COVID-19 testing in return for personal details, including Medicare information.

To avoid Medicare or Medicaid scams, remember these tips from the U.S Department of Health and Human Service's Office of the Inspector General:

- Be cautious of unsolicited requests for your Medicare or Medicaid numbers.
- Beware of unexpected callers or visitors offering COVID-19 tests or supplies. If your personal information is compromised, it may be used in other fraud schemes.
- Never respond to – or open links in – text messages about COVID-19 from people you don't know.
- Ignore offers or advertisements for COVID-19 testing or treatments on social media sites, and texts, a phone call or any other unsolicited communication regarding an investment "opportunity" related to the coronavirus.
- Rely solely on your physician or other trusted healthcare provider to assess your condition and approve any requests for COVID-19 testing.
- Be aware of scammers pretending to be COVID-19 contact tracers. Legitimate contact tracers will never ask for your Medicare number or financial information.

Finally, watch out for 'phishing' emails that seem to come from legitimate sources such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and urge you to click on a link to learn more about area coronavirus infections. The link is a ploy to get you to provide personal information.

Tips to guard against any scam

Finally, there are steps you can take to stay safe from any scams.

Never share financial or other sensitive personal information with anyone who contacts you unsolicited. If you receive an unsolicited phone call, remember this rule: When in doubt, hang up.

Be wary of scammers who use "caller ID spoofing" technology to make it appear that they are a legitimate government or law enforcement agency. Don't automatically trust the name you see on your caller ID screen.

Familiarize yourself with these common characteristics of scams: a sense of urgency or limited-time offer; payment by wire transfer or gift card; secrecy as a condition; guarantees of low risk with high rate of return; unsolicited offers, including social media outreach such as a post on your Facebook wall mentioning you.

Finally, if you think you've been a victim of a scam, report it by calling the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Elder Abuse Helpline at 1-866-623-2137 or the Department of Aging's abuse reporting hotline at 1-800-490-8505.



Enjoying a picnic last summer with the members of the Bessemer Croatian Club.



With the talented Eintracht Singing Society during Octoberfest 2019.

Legislative Roundup

Below are some recent laws that I helped pass:

Medication synchronization. Approved by the governor last year, Act 46 allows for patients to synchronize their medications in order to receive them on the same day each month, instead of having to make multiple visits to the pharmacy.

Extending the Social Security COLA moratorium. Act 95 extends the moratorium that was set to expire until Dec. 31, 2021, allowing thousands of seniors to retain their PACE/PACENET benefits.

Tax credit for school volunteer service. Act 20 authorizes school districts to implement programs allowing taxpayers 60 or older to receive a property tax credit in exchange for school services, such as tutoring and mentoring.

Pharmacy benefit manager ‘gag orders.’ Act 67, which I co-sponsored in the House, prohibits third-party companies hired by health plans from imposing “gag orders” on pharmacists that prevent them from telling customers when they can save money by paying with cash instead of using their insurance.

Prescription drug benefit fraud. Act 14 will help cut drug benefit fraud by requiring the Department of Aging to monthly cross-reference its list of beneficiaries with death records maintained by the Department of Health.

The following bills are in committee or have been passed by the House and sent to the Senate:

Older Adults Protective Services Act. House Bill 1930 would update and improve the Older Adults Protective Services Act by strengthening criminal background check provisions. It would also require financial institutions to train employees to recognize signs of potential financial abuse

of an older adult, and the process to make an abuse report. A similar bill to update the act – S.B. 819 – is currently in the Senate.

Elder abuse prevention. A package of bills – H.B. 397-400 – would permit care facility residents to place electronic monitoring devices, strengthen investigation and punishment of financial exploitation, and make it a crime to post social media photos of care-dependent individuals without their consent.

Tax credit for volunteer service. House Bill 974 – which I am co-sponsoring – would permit municipalities to establish programs allowing residents 60 or older to receive a real property tax credit in exchange for volunteer service. The bill passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support and is now in the Senate.

Background checks for adult guardians. House Bill 2209 would require background checks for adult guardians and prohibit convicted felons from serving as guardians. The bill is with the House Committee on Aging and Older Adult Services.

Pharmacy benefit manager practices. House Bill 941 – which I am co-sponsoring – would introduce transparency in pricing practices by pharmacy benefit managers in Medicaid and address inadequate reimbursement rates for smaller neighborhood pharmacies. The House passed the bill unanimously in November and is now in the Senate.

Transparency in long-term care facilities. House Bill 2437 would require the state or county department of health to publish the number of COVID-19 cases as a percentage of the total residents and the protocol for isolating positive cases. The bill passed the House unanimously in June and is now in the Senate.



Visiting with some of the folks responsible for the amazing food at the 2019 Greek Festival!



Spending a beautiful day at BalloonFest 2019 with members of Trinity Episcopal Church.



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Keeping pace with PACE

In case you aren't already aware, PACE is permitting seniors to keep several weeks' worth of medication on hand with early prescription refills. Previously, enrollees had to use 75% of their supply before refills will be reimbursed.

The program will now reimburse refills purchased before 75% of the days' supply has passed. (Does not apply to prescriptions for opioids and other controlled substances, which will be handled on a case-by-case basis.)

In addition, local pharmacies are now offering free delivery for older adults – even those who are not PACE beneficiaries. Ask your pharmacy about it.

Finally, as a result of COVID-19 guidance, no-contact prescription delivery is now available, as the program requirement that pharmacies must obtain a delivery signature is now waived, permitting medications to be left at your door.

My office can help you file for a property tax or rent rebate!

I want to remind you that my office can help you apply for a rebate under the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program. The deadline to apply for a rebate for taxes or rent paid in 2019 has been extended to Dec. 31, 2020.

Supported by the state lottery, the popular program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 or older; widows and widowers age 50 or older; and people with disabilities age 18 or older. The income limit is \$35,000 annually for homeowners and \$15,000 for renters, and half of Social Security is excluded.

Spouses, personal representatives or estates may also file rebate claims on behalf of claimants who lived at least one day in 2019 and meet other eligible criteria.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650, but supplemental rebates for qualifying homeowners can boost rebates to \$975.

There are some changes to the program this year, including a new law that permits faster processing of rebates. To read more, visit www.revenue.pa.gov.

For help applying, call my office to set up an appointment – and remember to bring identification, proof of age and income, and a copy of your 2019 rent statement or tax return showing property tax paid.



Meeting up with Santa and several members of the United Methodist Church on Decker Drive at their holiday event last year.



Enjoying some bewitching company on Old Timers Day last September.