

New initiative allows for critical access to pharmacy partnerships and vaccines across Pennsylvania



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CATEGORY: Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC)

The Pennsylvania Department of Health Long-Term Care Resiliency, Infrastructure, Support and Empowerment program partnered with a local pharmacy provider to address some long-term care facilities' struggle to get adequate vaccination rates. The pharmacy was able to provide vaccination services at the facilities, leading to higher vaccination rates, potentially saving lives and bringing facilities closer to resuming normal activities.

The "What"

As part of the Pennsylvania Department of Health's response to COVID-19, the Long-Term Care Resiliency, Infrastructure, Support and Empowerment (LTC RISE) was formed. This program, which uses Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) funding, started working with long-term care facilities (LTCF) to provide infection prevention measures in January 2022. Since then, the Emergency Response Team (ERT) and Quality Improvement Team (QIT) have come across many different facilities' needs and requests while providing assistance across Pennsylvania. One need that was critical to gaining resiliency in the fight against COVID-19 was assistance with vaccination rates. It was determined that many of these facilities did not have a pharmacy partnership to improve access. The process to establish pharmacy relationships by the facilities proved difficult. Other challenges identified were having too few residents needing to be vaccinated, and location, as many rural facilities were far from commercially available vaccination and testing.

LTC RISE looked specifically at facilities with low to no vaccine completion rates in residents and staff without pharmacy partnerships. All in all, the LTC RISE facilities in the Southwest (SW) that needed help included 12 PCHs, the Northcentral (NC) facilities included three personal care homes (PCHs) and one Independent Care Facility (ICF), and the Northeast (NE) facilities included two PCHs.



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SUBMITTED JUNE 2023

LTC RISE reached out to local pharmacies for partnerships, successfully securing nine across all regions. With research and perseverance, LTC RISE secured a pharmacy partnership with RxPartners, Inc. RxPartners, Inc. is a member of the senior care pharmacy industry that provides medications, vaccinations, and other ancillary services to seniors and LTC facilities in Western and Central Pennsylvania. LTC RISE was able to guarantee vaccination services be rendered by either the travelling pharmacist or nursing staff at several facilities, regardless of the number of residents and staff requiring assistance.

The importance of this initiative is protecting our most vulnerable populations. Knowing that the average age of a senior in facilities that provide living assistance is 87, LTC RISE knew it was important to make sure as many residents could be vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible.

The “So What”

The pharmacy partnership initiative reached all 20 facilities in need of pharmacy assistance and vaccine access. While exact numbers were not provided by all facilities, this initiative achieved notable successes. Five facilities achieved 100% vaccination rate among residents for the bivalent COVID-19 booster, and two additional facilities achieved vaccination rates of 90% or higher. In two facilities, 100% of the staff are now up to date with the bivalent COVID-19 booster, while one other facility is 90% vaccinated. All 20 facilities had at least one resident or staff member vaccinated with this initiative.

The importance of this initiative is protecting our most vulnerable populations. Knowing that the average age of a senior in facilities that provide living assistance is 87, LTC RISE knew it was important to make sure as many residents could be vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible. Older adults, with compromised immune systems and underlying comorbidities like hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, are at a much higher risk for contracting infections. Additionally, providing access to vaccines for staff members reduces the risk of transmitting illnesses throughout the facility and to the community at large. By providing access to the vaccine initiative, LTC RISE made a positive impact, potentially saving lives and bringing facilities closer to resuming normal activities.

The “Now What”

LTC RISE continues to screen facilities for the need of pharmacy partnerships. Vaccination status is a key focus in long term care, and LTC RISE will continue to gather information on both residents and staff during interactions with facilities. Moving forward with the vaccine partnership with RxPartners, LTC RISE will expand vaccination offerings to not only the COVID-19 vaccine, but also the seasonal influenza vaccine and other vaccines as they become available. It is the hope of LTC RISE that with continued research and engagement, additional corporate relationships will be established across the entire state.

Key contributors to this project include Melanie Marien, Alison Chestnut, and Paulina Brown, all with Pennsylvania Department of Health Southwest LTC-RISE Team.