To: Residential Care Facility for the Elderly Administrator or Skilled Nursing Facility Point of Contact and Healthcare Facilities offering COVID-19 testing

Date: October 26, 2020

Subject: Lay Caregivers as Essential Workers.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the vulnerable elderly population within congregate settings leading to changes within these facilities to protect this vulnerable population. It has become apparent that residents in congregate living facilities have been most impacted not only by the virus, but also by the changes to visitation policies that have restricted their loved ones from visits that provide essential caregiving activities. As we learn more about COVID-19 prevention and mitigation strategies, the restrictions and limitations on visitation that were put in place by licensing bodies have been updated and refined to safely allow for visits from loved ones with proper preventive measures in place. These preventive measures include frequent screening/surveillance staff testing, screening and limiting visitors as appropriate, limiting and modifying group activities, universal masking, enhanced infection control practices, proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff/caregivers, cleaning of surfaces, social distancing, and frequent handwashing.

In recognition of the importance of the role that lay caregivers, whether family or friends, play within these facilities, we believe that lay caregivers can return to providing care for their loved ones within congregate facilities with appropriate guidance which includes providing appropriate training to that lay caregiver around enhanced infection control practices for congregate care facilities, proper PPE use, and requiring regular covid-19 testing of the lay caregiver per the facility staff testing timeframe. These lay caregivers would be considered an essential worker set forth in Section 1300.67.01, subdivision (b)(5), of title 28 of the California Code of Regulations as a person working in a congregate care facility in the care of their loved one. Hospital systems and testing sites should provide covid-19 testing upon request to these lay caregivers as directed in the health officer order requiring testing at healthcare facilities.

Sincerely,

Chris Farnitano, MD
Health Officer, Contra Costa County