

COVID-19 devastating the elderly at nursing homes across the US

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As President Trump stepped onto the White House lawn on Tuesday evening to boast falsely about “substantial progress in our war against the virus,” the truth of the ongoing devastation caused by COVID-19 was revealed in the staggering numbers of sick and dead now being reported in America’s nursing homes, assisted living and long-term care facilities.

The *New York Times* identified 2,500 senior and elder care locations nationwide with coronavirus cases. The report says, “More than 21,000 residents and staff members at those facilities have contracted the virus, and more than 3,800 have died.”

These numbers are without doubt an underestimation of the real toll that the pandemic is having on this most vulnerable section of the population. As the *Times* explained, “Many states, counties and facilities have declined to provide information or provided partial information” regarding the scale and scope of the coronavirus on the elderly in nursing homes across the US. In some cases, this information is being kept a secret by government officials for fear of the reaction by the public and the families of those who are living under increasingly deadly circumstances.

While all age groups remain susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and can become very sick and die from it, the CDC reports that approximately 75 percent of Americans who have contracted the virus and 78 percent of those who have died from it are 65 years old or older.

Over the last several days, there has been a growing number of reports revealing the horrific situation at nursing home facilities across the country:

- At least 45 residents of the Canterbury Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center in Richmond, Virginia, have died after contracting the virus, the highest known death toll at a single long-term care

facility in the US. According to National Public Radio, more than half of the 102 outbreaks of coronavirus in Virginia are in nursing homes. Although the Virginia Department of Health has declined to release the names of all of the facilities, it has reported that more than 600 residents have been infected.

- In New York City, approximately 90 residents have died at two Brooklyn nursing homes. According to a nurse who spoke to the *New York Post* at the Chateau at Brooklyn Rehabilitation & Nursing Center in Sheepshead Bay, “These places don’t have morgues. They were putting them downstairs but now a lot of them are being left in their rooms. What else can you do right now?” The New York Department of Health released a report on Monday that said a total of 2,722 people had died in nursing homes statewide.

- Eighty-three residents of the Magnolia Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Riverside, California, were evacuated on April 8 when the facility became overrun with five staff and one third of those living there testing positive for the coronavirus. According to the office of California Governor Gavin Newsom last Friday, 400 residential care facilities and 1,266 residents are infected with COVID-19 statewide.

- Every single one of the 26 nursing homes located in the city of Detroit has cases of COVID-19 among both their residents and workers, according to recent reports from the Detroit Health Department. On Friday there were 191 cases of the coronavirus reported in Detroit nursing homes and 20 deaths. Eight more nursing home-

related deaths occurred in the city over the weekend, according to Detroit's Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan.

- There have been 44 veteran residents of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, Massachusetts, who have died from COVID-19, the majority of them over the past two weeks. At least 100 residents and 79 employees at the 247-bed state-run nursing facility have tested positive for coronavirus. Staff have reported that they were not provided with masks while tests results were pending for one resident, and when they came back positive, they were not told immediately.

With dozens of similar reports in urban, suburban and rural communities across the country, the pandemic is revealing a disturbing fact of life in the US: the nursing home and senior care industry is a vast network of privately owned facilities that are understaffed, paying low wages to workers who are not given adequate training or resources.

The nursing care industry in America has an estimated market value of \$139 billion. There are approximately 32,000 establishments, and the industry employs an estimated 1.7 million people. According to an industry analysis published by IBISWorld, "In the past five years, the industry has benefited from an increasingly aging population, which requires greater health care services. Individuals aged 65 and older make up about 90.0 percent of residents at nursing care facilities, so as the population continues to grow older on average, facilities are expected to serve an increasing number of residents."

Giant corporations have been cashing in on the aging of the US population and, through financial arrangements like government disbursement of Medicaid and Medicare funds for nursing home care, enormous fortunes are being amassed while the quality of life for the largely working class residents steadily declines, as the dire consequences of the pandemic is proving.

Genesis Healthcare is among the largest of the corporations in the "short-term post-acute, rehabilitation, skilled nursing and long-term care services" business. It has annual revenues of \$5.7 billion and operates approximately 500 skilled nursing centers and assisted/senior living residences in 34 states

with 61,300 employees. George V. Hager, Jr. is the CEO of Genesis Healthcare, Inc., and his total compensation in 2018 was \$2,227,887, with \$1.2 million in cash salary and the balance in corporate stocks.



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