

KEY FINDINGS

Of the **organizational characteristics** assessed in the study, only **provision of memory care services** was significantly associated with **staff absense due to fear of infection**. Residents with dementia may have more difficulty understanding, and adhering to, infection prevention protocols, such as social distancing. Staff who work with these residents may have felt that they could not adequately protect themselves from infection.

A few **process characteristics** were associated with staff absense.

- **Staff anxiety** was significantly associated with **staff absense due to illness**. Previous research demonstrates that major staff concerns include causing an outbreak at work or bringing the virus home.
- **Challenges with hiring new staff** were significantly associated with **staff absense due to family responsibilities**. About 61% of CNAs provide care to family or friends outside of work. Family needs and responsibilities were heightened during COVID-19 when regular support structures (e.g., school) were disrupted.
- **Challenges with sending staff home due to infection or precaution** were significantly associated with **staff absense due to sickness, fear of infection, and family responsibilities**. One explanation may be that when administrators sent staff home due to precaution, they could have heightened staff anxiety, and/or made staff more comfortable calling out due to precaution.

PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Long-term care staffing challenges are complex issues that require collaborative solutions between stakeholders, especially during emergencies. Policy makers and providers should reference the robust body of research on possible solutions to general staffing issues, including better pay, more empowerment, lighter workloads, and improved training, as well as lessons learned during COVID-19, to minimize byproduct effects of emergency procedures, such as staffing shortages.

Staff could also benefit from programs that minimize job burnout and stress, such as the mindfulness and resiliency program in Florida area hospices. Ideally, these programs provide staff with tools to better navigate emergencies, and space to process disaster-related stress.

Finally, this study demonstrated that leadership likely sets the tone for managing emergencies in their communities. This is a call to ALC administrators to lead with confidence, empathy, and clarity during disasters, as well as consider flexible staffing solutions that may help weather future emergencies.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Vogel, C.E., Dobbs, D., Peterson, L., Meng, H., Molinari, V. (2024). The Impact of Assisted Living Organizational Structure and Process Characteristics on Staff Absence During COVID-19. *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, 1(21). Doi:10.1080/08959420.2024.2319536

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