



*Caring that Feels Right at Home*

## Press Release

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### **Three-quarters of Home Medical Equipment Providers Have Prepared for Flu Pandemic and Most are Coordinating with Other Community Organizations**

ARLINGTON, VA, May 4, 2009 — More than half (53 percent) of the nation's home medical equipment and service providers have formal pandemic flu response plans and another 23 percent have stockpiled N95 masks or other supplies related to a flu pandemic, according to a survey of 1,500 providers conducted April 30 and May 1. Two-thirds say they are coordinating or communicating with other organizations in their communities to prepare for a pandemic.

A survey of approximately 1,500 home medical or durable medical equipment providers was conducted by the American Association for Homecare. The 147 homecare providers that responded collectively serve more than 2.5 million patients through more than 1,000 branch locations in all 50 states.

“Home-based care is a centerpiece of the national pandemic flu response and in a pandemic situation, home medical equipment personnel will be on the front lines,” said Tyler J. Wilson, president of the Association. “Our members have experience responding to weather-related emergencies and power outages, which present risks to patients who require oxygen through devices that require electricity. A pandemic flu presents a different set of challenges, but the home medical sector has prepared for them.”

Some home medical providers have had pandemic flu plans and training dating back several years. Pat Northheimer, clinical director at Cole Care in Coudersport, Pa., commented, “We had a pandemic flu drill three years ago that involved hospitals and local EMS. Projections were made with a scenario that worsened each day. It was very helpful in showing us just how bad things could get if the projections were accurate. The drill went into great detail.”

Apria Healthcare, a national home medical equipment and service provider headquartered in Lake Forest, Calif., tests emergency preparedness plans in its 500 locations at least annually and consults with local or state disaster preparedness authorities.

Bob McLellan, general manager of Pacific Coast Medical Supply, which operates one branch, in Astoria, Oregon, said, “We have notified local hospital, law enforcement, fire departments, and our local am radio station of our status and availability of services during emergencies.”

Two years ago, the American Association for Homecare participated, with the Centers for Disease Control and other federal agencies and with other healthcare associations, in a two-day panel to advise the federal government about the role of homecare in a pandemic flu. The chief result of that

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panel is the publication, “Home Health Care during an Influenza Pandemic: Issues and Resources,” prepared by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which contains useful links to resources and detailed discussion of key issues related to planning, patient care, community and business response, legal questions, and workforce challenges. View the text at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare/homehealth.html>. The report summarizes what homecare workers can expect during a pandemic:

**“What to Expect During a Pandemic.** In the event of an influenza pandemic, because of anticipated shortages of health care professionals and widespread implementation of social distancing techniques, it is expected that the large majority of individuals infected with the influenza virus will be cared for in the home by family members, friends, and other members of the community - not by trained health care professionals. Given these circumstances, home health care workers can expect to be called on to provide care for two main populations of patients:

- Those medical and surgical patients, not hospitalized because of the pandemic, who are well enough to be discharged early from hospitals to free up hospital beds for more severely ill patients.
- Patients who become or already are dependent on home health care services (predominantly elderly persons with chronic disease) and will continue to need in-home care during the influenza pandemic whether or not they become infected with the influenza virus.
- The demand for home health care services during a pandemic influenza outbreak is likely to exceed the home health care industry's current capacity to respond. Indeed, the overall surge capacity and preparedness levels of the home health care sector that will be necessary to respond effectively to a public health emergency such as pandemic influenza are significant unknowns.”

*The American Association for Homecare represents durable medical equipment providers, manufacturers, and other organizations in the homecare community in all 50 states. Providers of home medical equipment and services serve the medical needs of millions of people who require oxygen therapy, power wheelchairs, hospital beds, and other equipment, services, and supplies that allow them to remain in their homes. Visit [www.aahomecare.org](http://www.aahomecare.org).*