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The State’s Veterans Community Living Centers Implemented Required Infection Prevention Measures to Help Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19

DENVER—The Colorado Office of the State Auditor (OSA) has released its performance audit of infection prevention efforts at the State’s Veterans Community Living Centers (Living Centers) and found that the Living Centers implemented required infection prevention measures for staff to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities. The audit focused on infection prevention measures for staff since they posed the highest risk of bringing COVID-19 into the facilities, thereby putting residents at risk of infection. The Living Centers provide services to residents, including long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, and memory care. To be eligible for residency in a Living Center, a person must be an honorably discharged veteran, a spouse or widow or widower of an honorably discharged veteran, or a Gold Star parent of children who died while serving in the armed forces. There are five state-owned Living Centers in Colorado—four are operated by the Department of Human Services (Department) and one is operated under contract with the Huerfano County Hospital District and overseen by the Department.

Auditors found that the number of infections for both staff and residents, deaths, and the length of outbreaks at the Living Centers decreased as infection prevention measures were implemented based on state and federal guidance. From March 2020 through June 2021, the Living Centers’ had a lower “attack rate” (number of infections divided by the population) for both staff and residents than other similar types of residential healthcare facilities. The Living Centers had a median attack rate of 7.6 percent for staff and 4.1 percent for residents, compared to 12.1 percent for staff and 16.3 percent for residents in other similar types of facilities. From March 2020 through August 2021, the Department reported a total of 440 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among residents and staff across all Living Centers. During this same time period, the Department reported 58 deaths from COVID-19, all of which were among residents.

“Viruses can spread quickly in residential care settings, and the Living Centers serve a higher-risk population. This audit looked at whether the Living Centers had implemented infection control measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 from staff to residents,” said Derek Johnson, Audit Supervisor.

Infection control measures implemented at the Living Centers included initially restricting access to the facilities; screening all persons, including staff, at the door of the facility prior to allowing entry; conducting weekly polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and daily antigen testing for staff; and preventing staff from working if they were experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or after receiving a positive test. Additional measures taken included use of personal protective equipment, frequent handwashing/sanitizing, social distancing, environmental disinfection such as wiping down high-touch surfaces, and reporting active cases in the facility to the Department of Public Health and Environment.

Auditors found that the Living Centers conducted required monitoring activities to ensure that staff properly exercised infection prevention measures and developed plans to correct any issues identified. For example, each Living Center performed at least five and up to 16 infection control audits during the review period. Each Living Center also underwent at least one infection prevention survey conducted by the Department Public Health and Environment on behalf of the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The full report is available @ www.colorado.gov/auditor.

About the Office of the State Auditor (OSA)

Under the direction of the State Auditor, the OSA’s nonpartisan, professional staff promote government accountability by conducting independent performance, financial, and IT audits and evaluations of state agencies, departments, and institutions of higher education, conducting independent evaluations of the State’s tax expenditures (e.g., credits, exemptions, deductions), tracking about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law, and operating a statewide fraud reporting hotline.

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