



A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

July 22, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, service providers and organizations, I urge you to come together on another legislative package to address the continued public health and economic challenges the country is facing.

As we head into our sixth month of this public health crisis, we continue to hear from our members daily about what they need to help them and their communities fight both the health and economic battle against covid-19. The rising infections and deaths across the country show the need for unified and bold action from Congress and the federal government. As Congress crafts the next supplemental legislative package, we ask that you include the following targeted measures:

Increase financial support and protection for our front-line health care facilities and providers:

Hospitals and long-term care providers face ongoing and enormous financial challenges as they strive to respond to this unprecedented public health emergency. These facilities have changed their operations to focus on treating and expanding capacity for covid-19 patients while protecting and caring for other patients, residents and staff. As you know, hospitals are continuing to face significant revenue losses due to the reduction and cancelation of elective procedures at a time when they urgently need resources to treat patients and protect health care workers. Essential personal protective equipment, rapid covid-19 tests and medical supplies continue to be needed without delay. Specifically, we urge Congress to:

- **Enhance funding to ensure the availability of rapid covid-19 testing for every hospital, long-term care facility and other health care organization** to facilitate regular testing of employees and patients. This is critical to prevent the spread of covid-19 and protect patients, residents and staff while ensuring continuity of care and operations in our facilities;
- **Ensure frontline staff have the protective personal equipment they need** by facilitating through funding, the Defense Production Act and other means to enhance production and distribution of PPE to health care facilities and providers.

- **Provide loan forgiveness for the Medicare Accelerated and Advanced Payment (AAP) Programs** to address the continued financial strain and revenue losses of this raging pandemic. The continued loss of elective procedure revenue consisting of over 30 to 50 percent of hospital revenue, along with the ongoing escalated costs of covid-19 preparedness, supplies and care provision has placed hospitals and other providers on the brink of insolvency, especially safety net facilities. The AAP has provided a base of dedicated and stable funding for many of our hospitals and health care organizations experiencing unprecedented fiscal challenges, but they are financially unable to repay these loans now or in the foreseeable future as the public health crisis worsens in many parts of the country;
- **Continue replenishment of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) fund and ensure targeted relief for Medicaid providers** to ensure ongoing critical funding for front-line providers including hospitals and long-term care facilities;
- **Increase reimbursements for and make permanent the PHE telehealth flexibilities**, including ending geographic and originating site restrictions, giving the HHS Secretary authority to expand services and the types of practitioners eligible to furnish clinically appropriate telehealth services, and expanding usage to all home health, advanced care planning and hospice services where clinically appropriate;
- **Provide appropriate liability protection for health care providers and facilities** from unwarranted liability in situations that do not involve gross negligence or other misconduct;

Protect and Expand Health Care Coverage and Access: Congress should take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that everyone present in the United States, regardless of immigration status, has coverage for covid-19 related testing, treatment, and vaccines, with special attention to low-income or uninsured individuals and families. Specifically, we ask you to:

- **Establish a special enrollment period for the Federal Health Insurance Marketplaces;**
- **Increase eligibility and federal premium tax credits and cost-sharing subsidies** in the Marketplace Exchanges;
- **Increase the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to at least 12%**, and establish an automatic trigger tied to state unemployment to provide additional support should the epidemic necessitate more targeted relief. Increased FMAP will give states the resources they need as unemployment continues to escalate and families and individuals turn to the Medicaid safety net for coverage. This will also help states to meet the Medicaid Maintenance of Effort (MOE) provisions in the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* that guarantee coverage and protections for Medicaid beneficiaries;
- **Require 12-month continuous eligibility and enrollment in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, especially for post-partum women**, to ensure low-income women, children, individuals and families gain and maintain health care coverage;
- **Ensure states can use emergency Medicaid coverage for all immigrants** who need covid-19 testing or treatment and do not otherwise qualify for Medicaid;
- **Place a moratorium on CMS' proposed Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation (MFAR)**, which would only further threaten the viability of state Medicaid programs in this time of crisis;
- **Address the disparate effect of covid-19 on people of color and minority communities** by providing additional funding and policy support to assist HHS, states and localities ramp up, outreach, testing, treatment and data collection for individuals and communities.
- **Increase support for and access to palliative care** by including the *Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act* with additional immediate funding to train and equip providers to provide expanded palliative care;

Bolster the Social Safety Net: While CHA members provide for the health care needed by patients, nonprofit social service providers and individuals continue to need further assistance to meet their basic needs in this unprecedented time. We ask that Congress:

- **Support access to housing by increasing funding** for emergency rental assistance, 202 housing programs and **by enacting a temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures**
- **Increase funding for Emergency Solutions Grants** to help prevent and respond to outbreaks among people experiencing homelessness;
- **Increase the benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** and allow beneficiaries to purchase groceries online to limit potential infection.
- **Support for language assistance resources and outreach** for limited English proficient populations and other minorities;
- **Raise the cap and extend the Paycheck Protection Loan program** to assist nonprofits providing critical social services to those in need.
- **Support emergency funding for international humanitarian and global health programs** to provide critical personal protective equipment to front-line health care workers and to help prevent, diagnose and treat COVID-19

We continue to draw strength from Catholic health care's history of working to heal our communities during these public health emergencies and working collaboratively with government and other stakeholders to make this happen. CHA hopes that Congress and the Administration continue to work together for the common good, to protect our communities and prevent further spread of the coronavirus. We ask for swift passage of legislation that can deliver the needed resources to save lives.

Sincerely,



Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM
President and CEO

CC: Vice President Michael Pence
Members of the House and Senate
Treasury Secretary Mnuchin
White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows