

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

As frontline medical and mental health providers, our members are diagnosing, testing, treating, and counseling hundreds of thousands of individuals and their families as COVID-19 spreads across the country. During this unprecedented national emergency, we are committed to doing everything possible to prevent and slow the spread of the virus while ensuring that our patients, including minority populations and others who are historically marginalized and medically underserved, get the care they need. However, to date, the legislative response to the COVID-19 crisis has not included adequate measures to ensure immigrant families in our country are able to access the care that they need. We urge Congress to take steps to ensure that everyone in this country, regardless of where they were born, has access and coverage for COVID-19 testing, treatment, and prevention and feels safe seeking care.

A response that leaves out immigrants will be ineffective and detrimental to our efforts to stop this pandemic. Immigrants are a vital part of our COVID-19 response in the U.S., working on the front lines as health care workers, farmworkers, grocery store workers, and other essential service providers. According to the Migration Policy Institute, immigrants make up 29 percent of physicians, 38 percent of home health aides, and 23 percent of retail-store pharmacists. They also represent significant shares of workers cleaning hospital rooms, staffing grocery stores, and producing food. Ensuring the health and well-being of immigrants protects the health and well-being of us all and is key to COVID-19 relief efforts.

Currently, many immigrant families are ineligible to receive cost-free treatment and testing for COVID-19. Additionally, immigration policies like the public charge rule are leading immigrants and their family members to disenroll from health care programs and skip needed medical appointments. Minority populations and others who are marginalized and medically underserved experience higher rates of chronic disease, such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma, compared to non-Hispanic white communities. These health conditions predispose them to greater risk of mortality should they contract COVID-19. Additionally, language barriers for patients or community members with limited English proficiency may increase exposure to misinformation about the impact and nature of the disease. Therefore, such communities are disproportionately vulnerable to the uncertainty surrounding the preparation for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring the health and well-being of immigrants protects the health and well-being of us all. This virus does not discriminate and our response to this crisis should not either. We must ensure that *everyone* has access to the health care they need. Thus, the undersigned organizations call on Congress to rapidly pass a COVID-19 relief package containing the following provisions:

- Halt implementation of the Department of Homeland Security and State Department public charge regulations. This would reduce fear and encourage immigrants to receive necessary medical care, including mental health treatment.
- Ensure that access to health care, including mental health treatment, is available regardless of a person's immigration status, income, or categorical eligibility. Medicaid should cover the costs of testing and treatment of COVID-19 symptoms and related health conditions, and vaccines (when available) for all enrollees and for the uninsured.
- Ensure that information about COVID-19 and about how to access benefit programs is available in multiple languages and through trusted community providers. Ensure that healthcare providers have the resources they need to access interpretation services and to provide services in multiple languages.
- Ensure adequate funding for safety-net medical and mental health providers who are essential providers in many immigrant and low-income communities.

If we as a nation are serious about addressing the full scale of this public health emergency, we cannot leave anyone out of our response. We urge you to quickly pass legislation that will make our nation healthier and safer.

Sincerely,

America's Essential Hospitals
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Catholic Health Association of the United States
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners