

June 19, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) urges **the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to extend the public health emergency beyond its current July 25, 2020 expiration date so health care providers can continue to offer the most efficient and effective care possible during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.**

On Jan. 31, you declared a public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That declaration has proven critical in equipping hospitals and health systems with the tools and resources necessary to manage the COVID-19 surge and ensure high-quality care in this unprecedented environment. Further, your public health emergency declaration in combination with the President Trump's national emergency declarations have made available flexibilities and resources that allowed – and continue to allow – our members to use the vital tools necessary to combat the pandemic.

As you are aware, the current public health emergency will expire on July 25, 2020. We urge you to continue to extend the declaration until the following criteria are met:

1. The supply chain is able to continuously meet the increased demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to keep health care workers safe in treating patients with and without COVID-19, and able to meet the demand for laboratory testing supplies and treatment medications necessary to safely and effectively treat COVID-19.
2. The number of laboratory tests administered per day in the U.S. exceeds 500,000 per day, and the number of COVID-19-positive test results is equal to or fewer than 5,000 per day for a period of at least 14 days.



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3. The number of patients in intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the U.S. is fewer than 5,000 per day for a period of 14 days and no more than 10% of those patients are in any one city or region.
4. The number of deaths per day from COVID-19 in the U.S. is fewer than 500 for a period of 14 days.

We acknowledge that the last several months have been critical in ensuring providers had the resources required to manage the COVID-19 surge and care for patients. The challenges that our members have faced – rapid bed capacity increases, overnight telehealth system overhauls and implementation, and PPE acquisition – have been nothing short of extraordinary. However, with your help, hospitals and health systems have used every tool at their disposal to respond to this unprecedented challenge. Without your action and the impact of the public health declaration, these challenges would have been exponentially more difficult to overcome, which is why we are asking for continued action from HHS moving forward. We anticipate the challenges associated with COVID-19 that our members and communities face every day will continue throughout several months, and potentially another entire year if we continue to experience increased COVID-19 cases.

While not all areas of the country are seeing large numbers of COVID-19 patients, every hospital and health system is operating in a COVID-19 environment, requiring continued assistance from the federal government. Remarkable progress in combatting this pandemic continues to be made and now is not the time to pull back, but rather reinforce the need for a strong response from America's hospitals and health systems as we work through the coming months. We are hopeful that one of the vaccine candidates currently in development will successfully complete all necessary trial phases; however, until we reach that moment, our members, with your continued assistance and waiver flexibility, will remain ready and prepared to manage any future COVID-19 surges.

The AHA appreciates the support and assistance that HHS is providing to our members so that they are best positioned to care for their patients and communities. The health and well-being of our nation is our top priority, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to serve that goal.

Sincerely,

/s/

Richard J. Pollack
President and Chief Executive Officer