

January 11, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
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 you to renew the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declaration for at least another 90 days. In separate correspondence, we also are asking President Biden to extend for another year the national emergency concerning the COVID-19 pandemic under the National Emergencies Act. Both of these steps are necessary so health care providers can continue to offer the most efficient and effective care possible during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, these declarations are necessary to ensure continuation of the critical 1135 waivers and Medicaid coverage flexibilities.

On Oct. 15, 2021, you extended the PHE declaration through Jan. 16, 2022. On Feb. 24, 2021, President Biden issued a notice continuing the national emergency until March 1, 2022. We greatly appreciate these actions, which have made available flexibilities and resources that allowed – and continue to allow – our members to use the vital tools necessary to combat the pandemic. The emergency declarations have proven critical in equipping hospitals and health systems with the tools and resources necessary to manage the recent COVID-19 surges and ensure high-quality care in this unprecedented environment. In their absence, the challenges of the pandemic will be exponentially more difficult to overcome.

As you know, America's hospitals, health systems and front-line workers continue to face historic and unprecedented staffing, resource and financial pressures. This most recent surge resulting from both the Delta and new Omicron variants has once again threatened to overwhelm the U.S. health care system – from testing sites to emergency departments to hospital intensive care units. Since last Friday, there are over 1.5 million new COVID-19 cases, with over 101,300 hospitalizations (up from 96,475 on Friday) and a 26.6% 7-day average COVID-19 test positivity rate.



Many states have reported record high COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, with drug and device shortages, as well employee illness and burnout, rising dramatically in recent weeks. The challenges associated with this pandemic will definitely continue beyond Jan. 16, and possibly through the remainder of the year.

While not all areas of the country are experiencing COVID-19 surges simultaneously, every hospital and health system is operating in a COVID-19 environment, requiring continued assistance from the federal government. We are hopeful that as the vaccination rate increases and other COVID-19 countermeasures are developed and utilized, the PHE will eventually wane. Until that time, however, our members need the assistance and flexibility from the federal government.

The AHA appreciates the support that HHS and the entire Biden Administration is providing to our members so that they are best positioned to care for their patients and communities. **We urge you to extend further the PHE, which is set to expire on Jan. 16.** The health and well-being of our nation is our top priority, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

/s/

Richard J. Pollack  
President and Chief Executive Officer