

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, McCarthy, and Schumer,

We, the 28 undersigned organizations representing millions of American patients and their physicians applaud your continued efforts and leadership in responding to the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the COVID-19 illness. As patient and provider organizations, we remain committed to ensuring all Americans have access to high-quality care during this pandemic. We greatly appreciate the reforms and provisions in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act that prioritize patient access. As you work to draft additional legislation, we strongly urge you to consider the inclusion of additional measures to protect patient access to care.

Removing Unnecessary Barriers to Care

The actions taken by Congress thus far to increase access to telehealth services has been critical to ensuring vulnerable patients, those with chronic conditions, and those in rural areas are not denied necessary care. We urge Congress to make further reforms to ensure patients can access telehealth services across state lines and require ERISA plans to provide coverage for audio only services. This is critical to ensuring seniors and patients without access to telehealth technology can still have meaningful access to health care via voice only services. Further, we encourage Congress to guarantee payment and coverage parity for all medically necessary services provided via telehealth and mandate that other payers adopt similar policies. In addition, Congress should provide patients with financial relief and certainty surrounding cost-sharing by covering out-of-pocket cost-sharing for medically necessary services delivered via telehealth throughout the national emergency.

During this time, it is critical that all patients and especially those with chronic conditions have access to their life-saving medications and therapies. As such, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has encouraged all Americans to take the necessary steps to stock up on medications. We are grateful that the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has encouraged flexibility on refill requirements for Medicare Advantage and Part D plans. However, millions of Americans covered by ERISA plans still risk losing access to needed medications. We strongly encourage Congress to require all payers to provide an extra 90-day supply for all medications, including injectables and controlled substances, for the duration of the pandemic. This will not only support better patient outcomes but will also ensure that valuable hospital and physicians' office space is available for the most vulnerable patients.

We are also concerned by burdensome regulations and requirements, like step therapy, that prevent patients from accessing their medications. We urge Congress to require all payers to waive barriers like

step therapy, prior authorization, and other utilization management tools that impede on the physician and patient relationship and delay patient access to prescribed medications. Additionally, Congress should work with the Administration to make it easier for patients to access mail order pharmacies. These steps will not only help protect patients' health but will ensure that critical provider equipment and supplies can be used to treat the most urgent patients.

Protecting Patient Access to Care

With a record number of Americans now out of work, it is critical that Congress works to ensure Americans have access to health insurance. Congress and the Administration can help alleviate uncertainty for families by providing economic assistance to unemployed workers who wish to maintain their coverage through COBRA continuation of health benefits. Congress should also direct the Administration to re-open the Affordable Care Act health insurance exchanges to allow all Americans who qualify to select high-quality health insurance.

Ensuring the viability of medical practices and clinics of all sizes is critical in helping our nation fight COVID-19. We are grateful for your continued investment in health care infrastructure and personal protective equipment (PPE), and urge you to continue to provide resources for PPE as warranted. Without the necessary PPE, physicians put themselves and their patients at risk. Like many businesses, small and medium sized practices are feeling the economic impact of COVID-19. To ensure these practices can remain open and treat patients, we urge Congress to provide continued funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). This will provide much needed relief to struggling practices, and importantly will help ensure patients do not face unnecessary lapses in care.

Non-profit Research

Finally, we respectfully request the inclusion of provisions that would provide economic assistance for non-profit organizations that conduct medical research. Unfortunately, the current pandemic has stalled many clinical and lab research activities across the country. Because this research is often funded in part by federal grants and philanthropic gifts, the current economic situation has hit our nation's scientists hard; disrupting life-saving research that was in progress. As a result, organizations across the country are having difficulty maintaining compensation for their staff while they are shut out of the laboratory. Congress could help ease this burden by allowing non-profits that conduct research to qualify for forgivable loans from the federal government.

We appreciate your actions to date and thank you for your ongoing commitment to patients. We believe the proposals outlined above will help ensure American patients continue to have access to high-quality health care during the pandemic. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Lisowski, Congressional Affairs Manager at the American Academy of Neurology, mlisowski@aan.com.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy
ALS Association
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
American Academy of Neurology
American College of Rheumatology

Barrow Neurological Institute
Brain Injury Association of America
Child Neurology Foundation
Commonwealth Neurological Society
Endocrine Society
Epilepsy Foundation
Georgia Neurological Society
Illinois State Neurological Society
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Iowa Neurological Association
Massachusetts Neurologic Association
Maine Neurological Society
Michigan Neurological Association
Muscular Dystrophy Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Neurology & Sleep Clinic, PLC
New York State Neurological Society
North American Neuro-Ophthalmology Society
North Carolina Neurological Society
Pennsylvania Neurological Society
Rhode Island Neurological Society
Texas Neurological Society
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research