

July 14, 2020

(Sent electronically)

Dear Members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of our more than 200 member hospitals and nearly 40 health systems, the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) thanks you for your commitment to supporting hospitals and health systems in our ongoing work to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, care for patients and protect healthcare workers.

Hospitals answered the call to respond to COVID-19 quickly and with an extraordinary investment to surge capacity, increase their workforce, standup emergency operations, and access scarce resources and supplies. In addition to this increased investment, IHA estimates that COVID-19-related cancellations and delays have caused Illinois hospitals to lose \$1.4 billion a month.

Thanks to your leadership, the CARES Act and Paycheck Protection Flexibility Act included much-needed support for hospitals through the Provider Relief Fund and the Medicare program to help reimburse COVID-19-related expenses and assist with lost revenues resulting from the cancelation of non-emergent procedures. However, as the virus continues to take its toll on Illinoisans, it is clear more needs to be done if we are to slow the spread, save lives and protect our healthcare workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating economic impact on the state of Illinois. Without federal aid to offset hospitals' revenue losses and forthcoming reductions the state budget, patients and communities will suffer. As Congress develops the next COVID-19 federal response package, IHA respectfully requests your support for the following actions:

### **Support Additional Resources for Hospitals**

IHA estimates that COVID-19-related cancellations and delays have caused Illinois hospitals to lose \$1.4 billion a month. Additionally, hospitals continue to incur higher costs to acquire needed supplies and equipment, protect and maintain an adequate healthcare workforce, and prepare for future surge capacity. The resources provided to date through the CARES Act and supplemented by the Paycheck Protection Flexibility Act are an important first step. However, it is now increasingly clear that much more will be needed. **Congress should provide additional relief funds to hospitals, which are not only coping with a public health crisis, but also a financial crisis.**

### **Safeguard Frontline Providers from Legal Action**

During this unprecedented emergency, hospitals and healthcare professionals continue to provide

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care in extraordinary circumstances. **Congress should implement a limited waiver of liability for hospitals and healthcare professionals during the nationally designated COVID-19 emergency that will allow providers to continue delivering the best possible care under less-than-ideal conditions.**

#### **Improve the Medicare Accelerated/Advance Payment Program**

Hospitals are grateful for Congress' authorization and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' swift action to implement the Medicare Accelerated/Advance Payment Program. Given the substantial financial disruptions that have occurred as well as the ongoing need to prepare for future surges of COVID-19 patients, many hospitals will simply not be able to pay these funding advances back under the current program rules and timelines. **Congress should consider loan forgiveness, and at a minimum, significantly reduce the interest rate, which is currently around 10%, and extend the repayment schedule by an additional 12 months.**

#### **Protect and Increase Health Insurance Coverage**

Access to healthcare coverage is essential to ensuring patients receive the care they need to support their own individual health, as well as prevent further spread of COVID-19. As the economic stress of the pandemic persists, we expect thousands more Illinoisans to lose employer-sponsored coverage. The Medicaid program will continue to be a critical safety-net, however, the surge in demand is expected as the state faces dramatic declines in revenue. **Congress should take action to maintain health benefits for individuals and families and increase coverage options for those who are already uninsured by: providing employer subsidies for preserving enrollment; covering COBRA costs; opening a Special Enrollment Period for Health Insurance Marketplaces; increasing eligibility for federal marketplace subsidies; expanding the period during which insurers cannot cancel coverage for non-payment of premiums; and providing tax credits to offset COVID-19-related charity care furnished in a hospital.**

#### **Provide Additional FMAP Increase**

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act included a much-appreciated 6.2% temporary boost in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) in order to support states and the healthcare delivery system. **Congress should provide an additional increase of 5.8% for a total of 12%, retroactive to January 1, 2020 and extending until September 30, 2021.**

#### **Federal Support for Health Care Heroes**

Healthcare workers across the state have responded to the call of duty in unprecedented ways. Hospital employees, including nurses, physicians, facilities management personnel, and technicians are rising to the challenge to provide care to patients and communities. These frontline and essential employees put themselves at risk of exposure to COVID-19 every day. **Using the tax code, Congress should provide additional resources to front-line caregivers, such as support for child care, housing, transportation and bonus pay.**

#### **Permanently Expand Access to Telehealth**

Statutory and regulatory barriers to expanding telehealth have been temporarily lifted during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing patients to receive the care they need without risking virus exposure to themselves or healthcare professionals. Expanding access to telehealth beyond the public health

emergency will enable more patient-centered and convenient care, increase workforce capacity, and help remove barriers to accessing services. **Congress should permanently lift geographic and site restrictions on where patients may receive care; expand the types practitioners that may bill for telehealth; and the increase the list of covered services. IHA urges lawmakers to ensure care provided through telehealth is reimbursed at the same amount as in-person care. In addition to expanding use of telehealth, Congress should increase investment in Broadband through the FCC's Rural Health Care Program.**

A detailed list of IHA additional IHA priorities for the next COVID-19 legislation is available [here](#) and an infographic illustrating the impact of hospital losses on Illinois communities is available [here](#). Thank you for your continued support and attention to the needs of Illinois hospitals and the patients and communities they serve.

Sincerely,

A.J. Wilhelmi  
President & CEO  
Illinois Health and Hospital Association