

May 29, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of our more than 200 member hospitals and nearly 40 health systems, the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) appreciates your support for hospitals and health systems in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to seriously impact Chicago, Cook County and other areas of the country we request an additional targeted distribution for high-impact areas be made from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund.

Specifically, funding is urgently needed to assist hospitals serving high numbers of Medicaid and uninsured patients, as well as communities of color, which have been disproportionately harmed by the virus. The Chicago Department of Public Health found that as of May 27, African-American and Latino individuals accounted for more than 77 percent of all positive cases and 75 percent of all deaths.¹ We continue to hear from our hospitals serving predominantly African-American and Latino communities that many of their patients require additional lengths of stay and more costly treatment due to underlying chronic conditions, a circumstance further supported by the overwhelming data linking the increased risk of the virus to patients with underlying chronic conditions.²

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that as of May 27, Cook County had the highest number of COVID-19 cases of any county in the U.S.³ The cumulative financial effect on hospitals serving high numbers of COVID-19 patients has been devastating and could result in loss of access to care if stabilizing resources are not immediately provided. An additional distribution to high-impact areas should include hospitals which did not reach the previous threshold of 100 COVID-19 inpatient admission by April 10, and also factor in a hospital's proportion of COVID-19 admissions relative to its overall size. Finally, because hospitals in Cook County which met the previous criteria have since cared for many more patients at significant

¹ https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/sites/covid/reports/2020-05-27/Chicago_COVID-19_Update_V7_5.27.2020.pdf

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

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financial loss, we strongly urge the agency to include them in any future high-impact distribution.

Illinois hospitals and healthcare workers are doing everything within their power to care for their patients and communities during this pandemic. We respectfully request you take swift, decisive action on the requests outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,

A.J. Wilhelmi
President & CEO

CC: Eric Hargan, Deputy Secretary