



March 19, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
House Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

We are committed to working with you in every possible way to help America through the COVID-19 emergency. Our mission has always been to cover and care for the people we serve. That mission is more important now than ever before. We have their back – and they have our support.

One of the most important things we can do together is to deliver as much certainty as we can in these uncertain times. The American people need the peace of mind of knowing that their health and financial future are secure. That means knowing that they can count on their health care coverage when they need it most. It also means knowing that their doctors, hospitals, nurses, and other health care professionals have the resources they need to care for them.

This is especially important for Americans working in sectors of the economy facing the biggest hardships from COVID-19. As businesses of all sizes wrestle with mounting economic challenges and make hard decisions about their future, we must do everything we can to ensure that employees do not lose health coverage – which would make the harms and risks of COVID-19 much worse for hundreds of millions of people. We must also ensure that Americans who buy coverage on their own can continue to afford their coverage.

### **Helping Businesses and Families Get and Maintain Coverage**

We believe the following actions will deliver more certainty and support for all Americans – now and long term. We also believe they will provide greater flexibility to respond to evolving economic and health care circumstances:

- Support businesses in their goal to continue providing health coverage to their employees. There are many options for how this support could be provided. It could take the form of

payroll tax relief, or a refundable credit against employment tax withholdings, for firms providing coverage. It could include direct subsidies of the employer's premium obligation for each person covered under the employer's plan beginning on the day the crisis was declared.

- Establish robust new funding to support Americans who lose their jobs to allow them to maintain coverage. Congress should create new funding to support coverage for those who lose their jobs due to the crisis, by providing a 90% subsidy for COBRA or other insurance coverage.
- Establish a temporary, emergency risk mitigation program to ensure that health care premiums do not spike, and that benefits are stable in the future. Health insurance providers are covering COVID-19 tests and needed treatments. As more people seek coverage and care due to this pandemic, this temporary, emergency program would protect Americans from the consequences of potential catastrophic costs. This should be structured as a backstop contingency program that is triggered only if real-world health insurer costs are significantly higher than expected. Given the enormous uncertainty regarding the costs of the epidemic, we recommend that the program cover a portion of related costs for 2020 and 2021 and apply to the individual, employer, Medicare and Medicaid markets.
- Allow a one-time special enrollment period (SEP) for the individual market – regardless of an individual's current health status or whether they have coverage today. Given the risk posed by COVID-19, it is more important than ever for people to have health coverage. This will give people the opportunity to get the security and peace of mind that health care coverage provides.
- Enhance current financial assistance to lower the cost of premiums for those who rely on the individual market. Tax credits for those with incomes over 400% of the federal poverty level should be made available, and adjustments to the tax credit formula by age to would encourage more younger people to get covered.

### **Meeting the Needs of the Health Care Delivery System**

We must also take action to support the doctors, hospitals, nurses, and other health care professionals who treat patients every day by ensuring that our front-line, health care heroes have the resources they need to confront this pandemic. Specifically, we urge the Congress to:

- Provide emergency funding to hospitals to assist the surge in patient needs. This emergency funding can help secure critical supplies and future vaccines, re-purpose treatment units, and expand staffing. Funding could also help build temporary COVID-specific clinics that enable drive-through testing in communities that can help identify those in critical need and alleviate burden on hospitals.
- Support independent health care providers with direct financial support. Small and independent practices are struggling with a wave of cancelations, a dramatic shift from

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elective procedures to urgent COVID-19 tests and treatment, and their own staffing strains as parents stay home with children. Congress should make Small Business Administration loans and grants available so that practices can remain open, reduce the need to lay off staff, support personnel that must take leave, and shift resources to telehealth services.

- Enhance funding for testing and treatment of COVID-19-related conditions for those who remain uninsured. Congress should expand the new state option through Medicaid to ensure the uninsured are covered for treatment of COVID-19-related illnesses beyond the coverage of the diagnostic test and related visit recently enacted in HR 6201. Similarly, Congress should increase the funding allocation for the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) to cover treatment of COVID-19-related illnesses for anyone who remains uninsured. This NDMS funding would be in addition to the \$1 billion allowance Congress appropriated for coverage of the diagnostic test and related visit in HR 6201.

These changes are critical to help stabilize the coverage and care that hundreds of millions of Americans are depending on right now. Knowing that businesses and employees are supported, and that their care providers have the resources they need, are essential actions to help and support the people we serve. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you as our nation tackles the enormous economic and health care challenges created by COVID-19.

Sincerely,



President and Chief Executive Officer  
America's Health Insurance Plans



President and Chief Executive Officer  
Blue Cross Blue Shield Association