



Paul W. Abramowitz, Pharm.D., Sc.D. (Hon), FASHP
Chief Executive Officer

March 22, 2021

Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

On behalf of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

ASHP represents pharmacists who serve as patient care providers in hospitals, health systems, ambulatory clinics, and other healthcare settings spanning the full spectrum of medication use. The organization's nearly 58,000 members include pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians. ASHP also hosts the largest gathering of pharmacists in the world, the Midyear Clinical Meeting, with over 25,000 attendees each year.

For 79 years, ASHP has been at the forefront of efforts to improve medication use and enhance patient safety, providing critical resources such as an extensive publicly-accessible COVID-19 resource center, including a scientific evidence table for COVID-19 medication therapies and a health-system pharmacy surge toolkit. Additionally, since 2001, ASHP, along with our partners at the University of Utah, has provided a comprehensive drug shortages resource center that is free to the public and widely used throughout the healthcare community.

Across the country, our members are providing essential patient care in hospitals, health systems, ambulatory clinics, and other healthcare settings spanning the full spectrum of medication use. They are on the front lines of the COVID-19 response and they have been a lifeline for patients seeking testing, immunizations, and medications. They are also the leaders managing fragile drug supply chains on behalf of patients and the healthcare enterprise.

As highly-trained clinicians, pharmacists have the ability to significantly expand patient access to needed care and contribute to addressing/improving public health. However, major barriers restrict pharmacists from fully utilizing their expertise, such as lack of direct payment for services, including those necessary to support the COVID-19 response, and the inability to provide medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder. We urge you to use HHS's regulatory authority to remove these barriers and take action to ensure that pharmacists are fully engaged in patient care.

HHS' COVID-19 regulatory flexibilities have made it easier for pharmacists to increase patient access to quality care. These flexibilities, including test-treat-immunize and telehealth models, should be made permanent, as

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they have significantly increased patient access without compromising patient care. Given the financial and human resources dedicated to scaling up these service models coupled with their patient access benefits, retaining them is a common sense approach to ensuring our healthcare system is ready for the next viral threat.

Finally, prior to the pandemic, patients were facing a medication affordability crisis. Unfortunately, this will remain an issue after we defeat COVID-19. We urge HHS to take action on drug pricing, focusing on solutions that are tailored to reduce both patient out-of-pocket cost and systemic costs, while protecting vital safety net programs, including the 340B discount drug pricing program, patient access to medications and services, and our nation's drug supply chains.

Again, on behalf of all our members, congratulations on your appointment as HHS Secretary. ASHP would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our shared public health goals. Please consider us a resource as you work to improve our healthcare system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. W. Abramowitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Paul W. Abramowitz