

August 12, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McCarthy, McConnell and Schumer:

We are practicing physicians, and are deeply concerned that our nation's COVID-19 testing capacity continues to be inadequate. Failure to provide adequate access to testing jeopardizes the safety of healthcare workers and our patients. Currently, the United States is conducting about 500,000 tests per day nationally, but a new analysis from the Harvard Global Health group found that the U.S. would need 4.3 million tests per day in order to achieve suppression of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

A recent analysis found that 54% of U.S. counties, and 68% of our rural counties, do not have a single COVID-19 testing site.<sup>2</sup> What's more, 58% of U.S. counties with testing sites do not have sufficient capacity to meet recommended testing levels. At the same time, we have over 309,000 pharmacists across our country who could be utilized to expand access to testing. In fact, 90% of all Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy.<sup>3</sup>

Every state allows pharmacists to administer COVID-19 tests. However, the government will not pay most pharmacies to administer COVID-19 testing for Medicare beneficiaries.<sup>4</sup> This dramatically limits the ability for America's seniors to receive convenient testing from pharmacists in their community.

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Stein, NPR, *As Coronavirus Surges, How Much Testing Does Your State Need To Subdue The Virus?* (accessed July 17, 2020) available at [www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/30/883703403/as-coronavirus-surges-how-much-testing-does-your-state-need-to-subdue-the-virus](http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/30/883703403/as-coronavirus-surges-how-much-testing-does-your-state-need-to-subdue-the-virus).

<sup>2</sup> S. Lawrence Kocot, Health Affairs, *Expand COVID-19 Testing With Real-Time Processing Through Community Pharmacies* (July 1, 2020), available at <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200629.567658/>.

<sup>3</sup> NCPDP Pharmacy File, ArcGIS Census Tract File. NACDS Economics Department.

<sup>4</sup> Medicare payment is limited to pharmacies that are clinical laboratories, but fewer than a quarter of all pharmacies are CLIA-waived labs, leaving the vast number of the nation's pharmacies unable to provide these services. CDC, Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) Laboratory Search (accessed July 13, 2020), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/clia/LabSearch.html#>.

There is an obvious step that Congress can take to address this critical shortage and increase access to testing for millions of seniors at high risk for COVID-19 – Congress should allow pharmacists to be reimbursed for providing COVID-19 testing to Medicare beneficiaries.<sup>5</sup>

**We urge Congress to expand COVID-19 testing for Medicare beneficiaries by allowing them to access testing from pharmacists in their community. Congress should also act preemptively to authorize reimbursement of pharmacists for COVID-19 vaccination, so our nation will not face delays in immunization, when it becomes available, like we are currently experiencing for testing.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barry D Weiss, MD (Arizona)  
Melody Glenn, MD (Arizona)  
Rosemary S. Browne, MD (Arizona)  
Gary Green (California)  
Jennifer Dovichi (California)  
Nguyen Tran (California)  
Sophy Wong, MD (California)  
Jim Walsh (California)  
John Hon (California)  
Michelle Davey, DO (California)  
Ele Lozares-Lewis, MD (California)  
Ted McMenomy (California)  
Jacqueline Lunt (California)  
Karim Hatoum (Florida)  
Cecily Wang (Hawaii)  
Evan L. Claxon, Student Pharmacist (Kentucky)  
Adam Normandin, MD (Maine)  
Elisabeth Wilson, MD (Maine)  
Gerald (Wook) Beltran (Massachusetts)  
Douglas Smendik (Michigan)  
Michael Borromeo, MD (Minnesota)  
C. Douglas Cochran, MD (Missouri)  
Joseph Hubbard (Nevada)  
Mariam Habib (New Jersey)  
Jeffrey Snitzer (New Jersey)  
Abdullah Hakoun (New York)  
Idil Kirimca (New York)  
Ben Amosah (New York)  
Arthur Green, MD (North Carolina)  
Bryan Cobb, DDS MS (North Carolina)  
Charles E Kober, Physician Assistant (North Carolina)

David M. Rubin, MD (North Carolina)  
Hal Stoneking (North Carolina)  
J A Bardelas, MD (North Carolina)  
Ross Kushner (North Carolina)  
Jeffrey C. Hatcher, MD FACP (North Carolina)  
Jindong Xu (North Carolina)  
Joshua Landau, MD (North Carolina)  
Joshua Zavitz, DO (North Carolina)  
Katherine P. Schorr, NP-C (North Carolina)  
Marc E. Magod (North Carolina)  
Michael D. Altheimer, MD (North Carolina)  
Rakesh Alva, MD (North Carolina)  
Randy T Lewis, DDS (North Carolina)  
Robert Koehler (North Carolina)  
Robin Hyler (North Carolina)  
Thomas H Kuhn (North Carolina)  
Tanya Pratt (North Carolina)  
William E. Bowman (North Carolina)  
Zane Atkins (North Carolina)  
Kevin Supple (North Carolina)  
Allison Ellis, ANP (North Carolina)  
Belayenh S., Befekadu (North Carolina)  
Brian Cook (North Carolina)  
Brooke Meuth (North Carolina)  
Carina Brown, MD (North Carolina)  
Carolyn L. Harraway-Smith, MD, FACOG (North Carolina)  
Claudia C Prose, MD MPH (North Carolina)  
Courtney Crim, MD (North Carolina)  
Daniel Bensimhon, MD (North Carolina)  
Daniel Boyle (North Carolina)

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<sup>5</sup> NCPDP Pharmacy File, ArcGIS Census Tract File. NACDS Economics Department.

Daniel Goodrich, MD (North Carolina)  
David Alan Jordan, MD (North Carolina)  
Dayna Dunn (North Carolina)  
Donald S. Murinson, MD (North Carolina)  
Donielle Zimmerman (North Carolina)  
Hilary McCormick, MD (North Carolina)  
Eugene Bell III, MD (North Carolina)  
James Heath Maxwell, MD (North Carolina)  
James L. Edwards, MD (North Carolina)  
Kathryn J. Hecker, MD (North Carolina)  
Kelly Leggett (North Carolina)  
Laura Clark (North Carolina)  
Lee Meadows (North Carolina)  
Lonnie M. Kendall, AC-NP (North Carolina)  
Lynn Klett, BSN, RN, MSN, PNP-C (North Carolina)  
Mayah Dozier-Lineberger, MSN, FNP-C (North Carolina)  
Mina Fawze (North Carolina)  
Natalie Depcik-Smith, MD (North Carolina)  
Praveen Mannam (North Carolina)  
Robert V. Buccini, MD (North Carolina)

Robert W. Comer, MD (North Carolina)  
Ryan B. Sanford (North Carolina)  
Sarah Squire (North Carolina)  
Stacey Hammer (North Carolina)  
Tina Hunsucker (North Carolina)  
Todd D. McDiarmid, MD (North Carolina)  
William A. Hensel, MD (North Carolina)  
George Rose, MD (North Carolina)  
Mollie Scott (North Carolina)  
Saima Rizwan (North Carolina)  
Sheryl Gottlieb (North Carolina)  
Jose Mantilla-Rivas (Pennsylvania)  
Hayman Salib (Pennsylvania)  
Nathan Fields (Tennessee)  
Stephanie Hartline (Tennessee)  
Kevin G Garnepudi, DO (Texas)  
Kaila Haskins, CPNP (Virginia)  
Steven M Riddle (Washington)  
James H Conway (Wisconsin)  
Jeffrey Yochum, Pharm.D. (Wisconsin)