

# Containing the COVID-19 Pandemic and Mitigating Its Impact

## Recommendation

AAMC member teaching hospitals, physicians, and scientists continue to define the front lines of this pandemic, and while their efforts are a needed cornerstone in mitigating this crisis, the nation requires additional resources and policies to effectively respond to the pandemic and provide critical needed services for patients and communities. To combat the coronavirus during a time when COVID-19 hospitalizations are at an all-time high, the AAMC urges congressional action in six main areas: support for a national strategy that equips providers with the tools they need; federally funded research; provider financial relief; funding to support state and local governments; maintaining telehealth improvements; and support for training the next generation of health care professionals.

## Background

National Strategy to Help the Country Respond to the Pandemic: In July, the AAMC published a [road map](#) to address the current crisis through a coordinated, national framework on testing, contact tracing, vaccine distribution, supply shortages, addressing health equity, and strengthening our nation's public health infrastructure. In October, the AAMC recommended that the U.S. set a goal of conducting a sufficient number of tests per day to allow people to safely resume work and make communal activities less dangerous. Simultaneously, AAMC urges support for a robust contact tracing network to communicate new cases and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Additionally, to allow states and other jurisdictions to begin operationalizing their vaccination plans as soon as possible, the AAMC strongly supports inclusion of emergency funding to subsidize all elements of the vaccination process, including development of vaccines, distribution, administration costs, effectiveness monitoring, and transparent and reliable communications. For supplies and equipment to combat COVID-19, the AAMC recommends increasing production to enable health care institutions to maintain a three-day supply of personal protective equipment on premises, a 14-day supply available within a two- to three-hour drive of the facility, and a 30- day supply warehoused within a geographic region, based on the usual "burn rates." In addition, the AAMC recommends a 30-day national stockpile of critical supplies and equipment.

The AAMC also supports a robust investment in the nation's core public health infrastructure, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to effectively respond to the current crisis and prepare for future pandemics. Chronic underfunding has taken its toll on the nation's preparedness framework and under-resourced state and local health departments have been forced to manage a growing list of threats without commensurate support.

Research Funding: The AAMC recommends that Congress provide at least \$15.5 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support both funding for new COVID-19 related research and to provide relief that mitigates the impacts of COVID-19 on pre-pandemic research and the research workforce. Research relief funding is needed for NIH and other research agencies to support the research workforce, help institutions pay to suspend and resume research projects, extend time for research projects once they resume, and support career transitions for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. The AAMC supports the bipartisan Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act that authorizes approximately \$26 billion in relief funding for all federal research agencies, including \$10 billion for NIH, to support the research workforce, mitigate the disruptions to research and core research facilities, and ramp up research that has been halted or slowed.

Provider Financial Relief: The AAMC is appreciative of the \$175 billion that Congress has allocated to the Provider Relief Fund, which has helped to address some of the challenges and financial stress the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on the health care system. However, more resources are needed to respond to the exploding number of cases across the country – particularly in existing hot spots as well as those areas that are newer hot spots and did not receive Provider Relief Fund allocations based on early targeted distributions. AAMC urges Congress to allocate additional resources to the Provider Relief Fund to ensure the health care system can continue to respond to the pandemic. Additionally, in recognition of the important role played by Medicare reimbursement in the financial wellbeing of our health care system, AAMC asks that Congress extend the 2% Medicare sequester moratorium until at least the end of the public health emergency.

Telehealth: Given the massive changes that have occurred and the improvements to patient access and patient satisfaction, we urge Congress to make permanent the current telehealth changes, including the removal of geographic and site of service restrictions, while ensuring reimbursement remains at a level that will support the infrastructure needed to continue to provide telehealth services.

The AAMC also supports inclusion of the Temporary Reciprocity to Ensure Access to Treatment Act (TREAT Act, H.R. 8283, S. 4421) as it provides important flexibility during an emergency to ensure that patients receive the care they need. This would have many important benefits for patients, including providing access and continuity of care for mental health treatment, oncology patients, and others with serious or life-threatening conditions, and allowing health systems to draw on available licensed clinicians to meet the demands of a surge as outbreaks continue to arise. The TREAT Act also would facilitate providers' ability to respond to the next national emergency or pandemic.

State and Local Funding: It is the work of federal, state, and local governments to implement and prioritize policies and expenditures to respond to public health threats based on the CDC's professional guidance. Most public health actions are implemented at the state level; however, given the financial pressures on state and local governments due to chronic underfunding and lost revenue in the pandemic-induced financial crisis, additional federal financial assistance is necessary for states to protect the public's health throughout the pandemic. AAMC urges Congress to provide financial relief to state and local governments so they are able to appropriately fulfill their critical public health role.

Support for Health Care Professionals: Due to the pandemic, medical school leaders face massive health and safety challenges as they train the nation's physician workforce. The AAMC urges Congress to use the formula established in the CARES Act for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund to help institutions train the next generation of providers who will serve on the front lines of future public health crises. Additionally, the AAMC supports loan forgiveness for health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing emergency funds to programs such as National Health Service Corps (NHSC). The AAMC supports \$5 billion for the NHSC as proposed by the bipartisan Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act (S. 4055), or at least the \$800 million available through FY 2022 included in the Heroes Act (H.R. 8406).

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## Web Resources

[November 18 Letter](#) to Congressional Leaders on AAMC Year-End COVID-19 and Academic Medicine Priorities

AAMC COVID-19 Road Map: [The Way Forward on COVID-19: A Road Map to Reset the Nation's Approach to the Pandemic](#)

[April 17 Letter](#) to Congressional Leaders on AAMC Recommendations for COVID-19 Legislative Package