

March 20, 2020

Vice President Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-222, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Vice President Pence, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer,

We as health care and mental health providers across the nation urge you to ensure that personal protection equipment (PPE) is available to all health care systems, facilities, and providers to ensure safe working environments during the current COVID-19 pandemic and any future crisis. Providers across all settings are facing severe shortages of PPE, including masks and respirators, that will leave many unprotected and potentially infected by the virus.

In addition, America's health care and mental health providers believe more definitive and aligned statements from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) about the transmission of coronavirus is needed. The recent guidelines from both agencies differ on what masks or respirators are needed for health care providers on the frontlines of treating patients with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. Before any new guidance is released, the appropriate agency must have clear scientific evidence that the change in standards is proven to keep clinicians and their patients safe.

N95 respirators are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to provide the minimum appropriate protections to health care workers. While we acknowledge the challenges of ensuring an adequate PPE supply, we are concerned that CDC recommendations to lessen respirator requirements are based solely on supply chain and manufacturing challenges, and not evidence-based findings

The Administration, under the new guidelines for respirators and masks during the pandemic, must investigate and communicate on the transmission mode for COVID-19 so that decisions about appropriate PPE are based on the best information available. We urge Congress to include language in the next supplemental package to ensure the CDC communicates to the public the data-driven transmission science behind this decision. Health care and mental health workers deserve to be at ease and safe during this pandemic.

While the Administration announced that PPE production is ramping up, and has called on states to negotiate directly with manufacturers, health care providers should never be placed in a position where they do not have the protective equipment needed to safely do their jobs. There must also be a mechanism for States to acquire PPE if they are having trouble negotiating on their own for the proper quantities or at a cost that is appropriate.

As the nation's health care and mental providers, we call on Congress to:

- Require the CDC to provide science-based information on the transmission of the virus so that providers can make the best decisions on the appropriate level of protection.
- Support the immediate distribution of PPE to frontline health care personnel from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).
- Mandate that sustainable PPE levels should always be maintained at the SNS, including before, during, and following an outbreak, pandemic, or other emergency.
- Require a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study to review the actions of all applicable federal agencies to identify root causes of these failures in preparation for the next wave of COVID-19 or any other pandemic to hit the United States.
- Require a GAO study on the current supply chain of PPE in the United States and worldwide to prevent future avoidable shortages.
- Require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop reporting requirements for to better track shortages of PPE.

The nation's health care and mental health providers are ready to respond. We need proper support to care for patients safely and effectively. This includes clear, evidenced-based protocols and the highest level of protection in order to care for infected individuals as well as prevent the spread of the coronavirus in health care facilities and the community. Congress and the Administration must exhaust every option available to increase PPE production and prioritize distribution to frontline providers and health care facilities.

American Academy of Audiology
American Academy of PAs
American Association of Nurse Practitioners
American Chiropractic Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Optometric Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Podiatric Medical Association, Inc.

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers