

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

As a nationwide, not-for-profit society of geriatrics healthcare professionals, the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of older people. Geriatricians are primary care doctors who have additional specialized training in age-related physical and mental health conditions. Our clinician members remain on the frontlines of the battle against COVID-19 with some of our most vulnerable older Americans and their families.

We greatly appreciate the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s distribution of funding to physicians and hospitals from the Provider Relief Fund, provided by the CARES Act. However, many primary care practices and especially those caring for older adults, have not received the financial support needed although they remain in dire financial condition from the ongoing public health emergency. While we are grateful that some AGS member providers received Part B funds in the first round funding and received funds from the Paycheck Protection Program, the resources provided to date are not reaching all primary care practices and providers who need it, and these funds are not sufficient to sustain practices. We urge you to consider our recommendations below.

Primary care providers continue to struggle to meet the needs of their patients and to maintain operations, while facing significant reductions in patient volume and practice revenue, and increases in expenses related to COVID-19, such as technology to support telehealth needs and remote providers/staff and personal protective equipment (PPE), which continues to be in short supply. Some practices, across all types of specialties and care settings, are temporarily closed or will need to close in the coming weeks and months. A recent survey from the Larry Green Center reported 52 percent of primary care offices lack PPE, 27 percent of respondents skipped or deferred clinician pay, and 35 percent have furloughed staff.<sup>1</sup> Without immediate support for primary care practices – which are crucial to our healthcare system and particularly to older Americans with medical complexity and greater susceptibility to the virus – primary and geriatric care practices may not be able to remain open. The AGS recommends HHS ensure primary care physicians and practices receive dedicated funding out of the Provider Relief Fund, similar to the targeted allocation for rural hospitals, so that primary care practices may continue to operate and provide services to older adults.

Primary care physicians specializing in geriatrics play a central role in maintaining older Americans' health by focusing on wellness and preventive health as well as managing chronic medical

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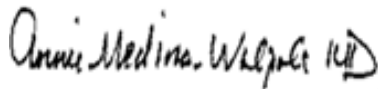
<sup>1</sup> Primary Care Practice Collaborative & Larry Green Center (2020, June). *Quick COVID-19 Primary Care Survey: Series 12 Fielded May 29 – June 1, 2020*. Retrieved from: [https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/news\\_files/C19%20Series%2012%20National%20Executive%20Summary%20with%20comments.pdf](https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/news_files/C19%20Series%2012%20National%20Executive%20Summary%20with%20comments.pdf).

conditions. With older adults at much higher risk of morbidity and mortality from COVID-19,<sup>2</sup> that role has become substantially more complex and costly for geriatric practitioners. Primary care practices and geriatricians are simply unable to generate the revenue needed to continue operations with the significant decrease of volume of visits and procedures with the current pandemic. We urge you to prioritize distribution of remaining Provider Relief Funds to sustain these practices as we battle this deadly pandemic.

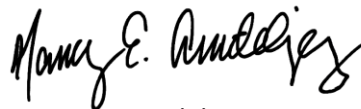
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Thank you for all you are doing to support our frontline workforce, patients, and older Americans during this challenging time. We stand ready to support you and provide guidance as the COVID-19 public health emergency continues to evolve. For additional information or if you have questions, please contact Anna Kim by emailing [akim@americangeriatrics.org](mailto:akim@americangeriatrics.org).

Sincerely,



Annette Medina-Walpole, MD  
President



Nancy E. Lundebjerg  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness. April 2, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>.