

July 17, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Alex Azar  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the more than 600,000 physicians and medical students represented by the combined memberships of the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Physicians, the American Osteopathic Association, and the American Psychiatric Association, we write to urge the administration to affirm the role of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as the key agency charged with protecting public health both during pandemics and under normal circumstances. It is also important to recognize the indispensable role that public health and scientific experts have in curbing the current pandemic. Collaboration and coordination between the members of the Coronavirus Task Force, the CDC, and state and local health departments is fundamental to stopping the virus.

Our organizations are very concerned by the recent reports that the administration is considering narrowing the CDC's mission, in particular the decision to use a private collection system for hospital data reporting for COVID-19 hospitalizations, deaths, availability of intensive care unit beds, and other crucial resources while bypassing the CDC. Transparency is essential to effectively address the continued rise in COVID-19 cases and limiting access to these or other data will impact the public health and clinical response to the virus, ultimately leading to unnecessary harm. The growing sense of misinformation and mistrust in the US will be exacerbated by policies that limit transparency and undermine public confidence in the accuracy of government information about of the true impact of this pandemic.

The CDC's work to strengthen America's health security is a critical national interest. Especially during a pandemic, the CDC plays a critical role as the preeminent organization run by world experts in epidemiology, surveillance, medicine, and other essential disciplines working to address threats to our nation's collective health. Our organizations rely heavily on the CDC to provide access to real-time and accurate data that inform and support the practice of our members and improve the health of their patients. Our members are serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 public health emergency and recognize the key role CDC is playing in response to the outbreak – providing guidance to states, clinicians, and all Americans; supporting laboratory testing for the virus; and enhancing surveillance efforts to inform the nation's response. COVID-19 is highlighting the importance of having a strong CDC and public health infrastructure to respond to outbreaks.

We also ask you to ensure that the scientific and public health expertise from leaders across the Department of Health and Human Services, including at the CDC, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Dr. Anthony Fauci in his capacity as Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, as well as state and local health departments, are the driving force behind guidance, recommendations, and information that is provided on how to control the spread of COVID-19.

We ask that the administration prioritize investments in public health and its infrastructure, including all of the CDC's core functions. These investments, along with support for medical research at the NIH, including the significant investments supporting vaccine development, and the Food and Drug Administration's related processes, are a vital part of our nation's short- and long-term efforts to protect public health.

The challenges the CDC, and the broader public health infrastructure, are experiencing have been exacerbated by chronic underfunding, which affects the CDC's work as well as that of state and local communities who rely on its support. We are eager to work with you to support the work of these public health agencies to protect the American people during the pandemic and in the future.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Pediatrics

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American College of Physicians

American Osteopathic Association

American Psychiatric Association