



June 29, 2020

Mr. Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

Flexibilities issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) during the current public health emergency have allowed health care providers to treat the surge of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 while continuing to provide safe access to care for other patients. **The Joint Commission urges the Secretary to extend the public health emergency so that the nation's health care providers can continue to utilize these critical flexibilities.** Many health care organizations are seeing a resurgence in new COVID-19 patients, while other organizations are still recovering from managing the initial surge in cases. The current July 25th expiration date would eliminate flexibilities that are still needed.

In recent weeks, several states have seen stark increases in new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. Across the country, health care systems continue to treat the COVID-19 response as their number one priority. Hospitals are not yet ready to step down from the pandemic response, and quickly reverting to normal operating requirements while continuing to provide COVID-19 patients with the special attention they need will place a significant strain on health care systems. If the Secretary is not able to extend the public health emergency, The Joint Commission recommends HHS exercise enforcement discretion to allow a grace period in which providers can return to normal operating status.

As a leader in health care safety, The Joint Commission has supported HHS' response to the ongoing public health emergency. To meet the needs of patients during the COVID-19 outbreak, health care organizations have relied on waiver flexibilities to increase patient capacity, expand telehealth services, reduce administrative burden, and allow clinicians to work at the top of their license, among other flexibilities. With HHS' guidance, health care providers have continued to meet the challenge of responding to the pandemic. Extending the public health emergency allows health care providers to continue drawing upon these vital tools.

The Joint Commission applauds the many actions HHS has taken to ensure that health care organizations have all the resources they need to combat COVID-19. HHS leadership has played a vital role in the COVID-19 response, and we urge HHS to give health care organizations more time by extending the public health emergency.

The Joint Commission is pleased to answer any questions you may have regarding our comments. If

The Joint Commission on the Public Health Emergency Declaration

you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or staff: Patrick Ross at pross@jointcommission.org or Kathryn Spates at kspates@jointcommission.org or 202-783-6655.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. VanAmringe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Margaret VanAmringe, MHS
Executive Vice President for Public Policy and Government Relations