

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We respectfully request that you urgently distribute the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund's (PHSSEF) \$100 billion, and consider the needs of Oregon health care providers and stakeholders as you allocate these funds. In recent weeks, health care providers, communities, and families have risen to the occasion to do their part and respond to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emergency. Our state has taken extraordinary steps to prepare the health care infrastructure for providing care to those who need it now and in the future. The Administration must meet these heroes on the front lines and deliver these Congressionally appropriated dollars without delay to those in need.

Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136) which provides \$100 billion in emergency funds for health care providers to cover expenses and lost revenues attributable to COVID-19. Expediency in making payments from the PHSSEF funds to eligible health care providers is critical. The expected loss of life due to COVID-19 is unacceptable and can only be abated with swift, decisive action and assistance to those in the trenches fighting back. We urge HHS to distribute this funding as Congress intended, in a manner that is based on the emergency need and does not disadvantage states based on their population's health care coverage or lack thereof.

Since the first COVID-19 case was reported in Oregon, hospitals and health care providers across the state have rallied to meet the COVID-19 challenge with too few tests, personal protective equipment (PPE), and staff while watching operating revenue plummet. For example, hospitals have invested millions of dollars to develop surge capacity, purchase essential medical supplies and equipment if available, and support an adequate workforce to respond to the acute care needs during the emergency. At the same time, they are facing a significant decrease in revenue, forced to cancel elective procedures to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 and make room for COVID-19 patients. These challenges are all the more concerning for rural and safety-net hospitals in Oregon, without whom many communities would have no access to health care. The people and organizations on the front lines of this crisis are in desperate need of support.

Physician practices, nursing homes, home health agencies, hospices, and other health care providers in Oregon communities are also facing enormous challenges. We hear every day about the toll COVID-19 is taking on these providers, as they seek out scarce PPE, confront workforce shortages, and adjust to new ways of delivering care. These are just a few examples of providers working day in and day out to care for Oregonians under impossible circumstances. We urge you to consider providers across the health care spectrum when allocating the PHSSEF to ensure all providers have the resources they need.

The time for aggressive action is now. Congress provided these critical funds, and those dollars need to get to the hands of America's health care system now. We therefore request that you make any application process as easy as possible to complete so providers can focus on saving lives rather than completing paperwork or worrying if their doors will stay open. We urge you to distribute the PHSSEF funds as soon as possible, reflecting the needs of Oregon health care providers working tirelessly to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer
United States Representative



Peter A. DeFazio
United States Representative



Suzanne Bonamici
United States Representative



Kurt Schrader
United States Representative

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Walden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and "W".

Greg Walden
United States Representative