



May 8, 2020

Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Secretary
NC Department of Health & Human Services
2001 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-20001

Dear Secretary Cohen:

Thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. We appreciate your unrelenting efforts towards helping keep people safe through this unprecedented time.

We want to share with you a survey of our members we completed earlier this week. It builds on our survey from March. Our members noted some concerns that you are often already working to address and we look forward to continuing to work with you on these efforts, including financial health and sustainability of practices, sustainability of telemedicine, PPE, and patient education, especially around vaccines. This survey is as summarized below and attached.

While clearly this is taking and will continue to take ALL of us, a few immediate possible strategies that could be enacted by the Department to further support primary care include:

- Use your strong voice towards patient education, especially the need for parents to have their children vaccinated timely
- Continue strategies such as the PMPM increase and provider rate increase to help primary care in this time of fiscal distress
- Consider focused efforts for rural and physician-owned practices who are particularly struggling
- Advocate to the General Assembly for specific funding to assist independent practices particularly primary care practices that are crucial to access to care
- Continue efforts to secure and distribute additional PPE and let us know how we can be helpful in sharing resources and promoting outreach
- Continue the focus on telemedicine with long lead times for any changes to help with scheduling of patients, promotion of telehealth with North Carolinians, and implementation of strategies to improve Internet access, especially for patients

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We would also like to highlight some of the findings that show that the efforts of NCDHHS are useful and successful in supporting primary care:

- Telehealth supports have been used. Overall, 93 percentage of physicians report using telehealth. The percentage of physicians reporting the need for help with nuts and bolts of telehealth declined from 30 percent to 13 percent over the 5 weeks between the two surveys.
- PPE changes have made a difference. While the percentage of physicians reporting PPE needs remains high (59 percent), it has declined since March. Slightly more than half of physicians using the NCDHHS Website to Request PPE have received at least some PPE.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Financial stress is significant and growing. Overall, 87 percent of primary care physicians reported significant or extreme financial impact, up from 83 percent in March. Two-thirds of practices reported patient volume declines of 40 percent or more. One-in-ten are considering closing or selling their practice, with higher numbers for rural practices (13 percent) and physician-owned practices (14 percent)
- There is still a strong need for PPE in primary care. Physician-owned practices report an even greater need for PPE.
- Almost all primary care practices indicated concerns around the financial impact of COVID-19, with physician-owned practices reporting the greatest need.
- The large majority of primary care practices (93 percent) are utilizing telehealth.
- Practices are very concerned about their own ability and the ability of their patients to use telehealth effectively. An increasing percentage of physicians report a need to help patients effectively access and use telehealth.
- The large majority of practices are taking drastic actions to lower costs by reducing hours, salaries and/or workforce.
- There is a growing concern about access to mental health services for patients and state ability around testing.

The supports of NCDHHS are clearly making a difference for physicians; however, the situation remains dire. There is a serious risk that the state will lose primary care capacity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic if short-term and on-going assistance is not provided.

Thank you again for your leadership.



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