

December 23, 2020

Governor Andrew Cuomo, Chair
Governor Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 N. Capitol St NW, Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chair Cuomo and Vice Chair Hutchinson:

Our organizations represent tens of thousands of community primary care physicians who are on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19. These physicians also are providing care to millions of Americans who have ongoing health care needs unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. As states continue to determine their plans for the allocation, distribution and administration of the new COVID-19 vaccines, **our organizations urge you to accelerate enhanced collaboration with community-based primary care physicians and practices.**

Our organizations are committed to ensuring equitable access to vaccines for all, but we know the ultimate success of this effort will hinge on widespread coordination and communication with all stakeholders – especially primary care physicians and practices – particularly those in rural and underserved communities.

Primary care physicians play a critical role in the fight against COVID-19 by diagnosing, testing, treating, and counseling millions of patients and their families. Additionally, these physicians collaborate within teams of clinicians and view of patients as part of families in communities.

We call on states to immediately facilitate the inclusion of community primary care physicians and their practices in vaccination strategies. These physicians and practices are the foundation of our health care system and should, as a matter of public policy, be protected from this virus so they can safely provide care to the millions of patients they care for each day. The faster we vaccinate all primary care physicians and their teams, the faster they can safely provide care to their communities. Clear communication from states and public health departments about how and where primary care physicians and their staff can get vaccinated will help speed this process along.

We encourage states and communities to increase coordination and collaboration with primary care physicians and practices. Given the vital role that primary care physicians play in counseling patients on the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines, we strongly recommend distribution plans include the role of primary care physicians in patient education and counseling in all phases of vaccine distribution, even if they are not yet directly involved in administering the vaccine.

Patients are already contacting their primary care physicians for information on the vaccines and, in many cases, these physicians are not equipped with accurate and up-to-date information to educate their patients. Providing these physicians and their practices timely and consistent education resources is important to increasing vaccine confidence among physicians and their patients. Effective vaccine counseling requires that primary care physicians have not only accurate data on vaccine safety and efficacy across populations, but information to answer patients' questions about how and where they can receive the vaccine.

Many small and independent physicians are in areas across the country without access to large retail pharmacies. What's more, these physicians will be counseling hundreds of thousands of patients on the importance of getting vaccinated without a clear way to connect their patients to the vaccine. Clear communication and coordination with community-based primary care will be critical to your success of widespread vaccination.

We encourage ongoing compliance with proven public health strategies such as the wearing of face masks, social distancing, and hand washing. We also encourage states to discourage indoor gatherings by closing or limiting occupancy at restaurants, bars, night clubs, gyms and public entertainment venues. We also encourage states to establish a single, easily accessible source of information where the public and health care workers can access information about testing and vaccine locations.

We encourage states to ensure that frontline primary care physicians and practices have access to personal protective equipment (PPE). Many primary care physicians continue to face challenges in the procurement of PPE. We call on public health agencies to establish clear protocols for how primary care physicians and their practices can request and obtain PPE in the event of a shortage. If state and local PPE supplies are depleted and commercial supplies are unavailable, we ask that governors or their designee request federal assistance from the Department of Health and Human Service. Protecting frontline primary care physicians and their practices must be a priority since they are central to ensuring the health and wellbeing of individuals and families.

In closing, we stress that states do all they can to facilitate the immediate and broad vaccination of community-based primary care physicians and their practices. Failure to do so will only further compromise the safety of patients who are seeking care for COVID-19 and non-COVID health issues. We also stress enhanced coordination with community-based primary care practices as part of your vaccine distribution strategies. Failure to meaningfully incorporate primary care into distribution and education efforts will jeopardize the ultimate success of vaccination strategies.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of these requests. Your commitment to partnering with frontline primary care physicians and practices will ensure that vaccination strategies are successful.

Sincerely,

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Aledade
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Physicians
Buffalo Medical Group
Caravan Health
Catalyst Health Network
ChenMed
Elation Health
Iora Health
MDVIP
Oak Street
One Medical

Paladina Health
Physicians Group of Southeastern Ohio
Pioneer Physicians Network
Premier Family Physicians
PriMed Physicians
Starling Physicians
The Toledo Clinic
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