

September 22, 2021

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, Congressional leaders, and other members of the administration,

COVID-19 has devastated our nation and economy, killing more than 672,700 Americans, permanently shuttering nearly 100,000 businesses, and putting over 23 million people out of work at the height of the lockdowns.¹²³⁴ Those with chronic health conditions or disabilities, communities of color, and underserved communities were especially hard hit. Estimates of the economic fall-out in the U.S. through Fall 2021 totaled \$16 trillion – or 90 percent of U.S. GDP.⁵

As we have seen in recent weeks with the rise and broad impact of variants, this pandemic is far from over and increasing efforts to address it are as important as they were a year ago. The effectiveness of our continued response to COVID-19 and the robustness of our recovery stems from strong partnerships between American industries and government. Despite all the challenges of the pandemic, doctors, hospitals and other medical providers; drug and diagnostic companies; Medicare plans and other insurers; and domestic manufacturers of personal protective equipment (PPE) have risen to the challenges, leveraging their strengths and prior work, and making significant, continuing investments to support the U.S. response to COVID-19. This work is not done. These partners have critical roles to play now if our nation is to successfully address COVID-19 variants and to fuel a robust recovery.

Domestic capabilities and capacity in key industries, in collaboration with the government, provided the U.S. with an unparalleled ability to respond to the pandemic and counter unprecedented challenges in record time. These partnerships continue to be needed today, will be needed again in the future, and cannot be rebuilt in response to another emergency overnight. We strongly encourage the federal government to continue working with these COVID-19 response partners to build upon the investments made and strengths revealed in response to the current pandemic. Such relationships are critical to continued recovery and sustainable gains that will better prevent and prepare for the next public health emergency and to minimize the human and economic toll of COVID-19.

We have growing concerns, however, about federal efforts that will undermine our domestic strengths at a time we need them most. The active pursuit of medical provider reimbursement cuts and government price setting policies for key industries, will do irreparable damage to vital parts of our health care response to the ongoing threat COVID-19 presents. Additionally, letting domestic PPE manufacturers go bankrupt as has been reported in the news⁶ is another detrimental impact to American industry's ability to respond quickly in pandemic preparedness and response efforts. Finally, as we anticipate future public health threats, such as antimicrobial resistance, it is critical that we take lessons learned from the current pandemic and rather than stifle companies that are developing antibiotics instead fortify their efforts towards future innovation and protection for people across the U.S. and our health care system.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/11/unemployment-rose-higher-in-three-months-of-covid-19-than-it-did-in-two-years-of-the-great-recession/>

³ <https://fortune.com/2020/09/28/covid-buisnesses-shut-down-closed/>

⁴ <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/jobtracker/>

⁵ 2020_10_23_Science-Update_Final_Public.pdf (cdc.gov)

⁶ U.S. Companies Making N95 Masks For COVID Struggle As Cheap Chinese Masks Return: NPR

We therefore urge you to reject any efforts that would undermine these industries while their work to respond to COVID-19, to enable a robust recovery, and to ensure pandemic preparedness with the United States persists.

Instead, we ask that formal working relationships with the following be established to ensure continued partnership and U.S. success as a result:

- 1. Medical Product Manufacturers.** Building on longstanding investments by the biopharmaceutical industry, government and the private sector worked collaboratively to ensure that there would be numerous shots on goal for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, as well as options for diagnostics and testing. The strength of the biopharmaceutical sector in the U.S. assured Americans early, consistent access to COVID-19 clinical trials, vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics to lessen the toll. The sector produced multiple vaccines with extremely high efficacy rates and therapeutics helping to reduce morbidity and mortality among those infected in less than a year's time. Early access to highly effective vaccines is estimated to have saved as many as 140,000 Americans with an economic impact of \$625 billion to \$1.4 trillion just from lives saved.⁷ The ability to respond so quickly and successfully hinged upon decades of investments in vaccine development platforms and capacity as well as a strong biomedical ecosystem within the U.S. In addition to the lives saved, U.S. development of these vaccines and therapeutics has enabled us to return to work and school safely and prevent trillions in economic fallout. Partnerships with drug and device manufacturers to foster continued investment and innovation in infectious diseases and public health is essential to help us not only continue the fight against COVID-19, but also to prevent or better respond to national and international health emergencies in the future.
- 2. Medical Providers.** Physicians, hospitals and other medical providers made significant changes, which often required sizable financial investments, to their business models to manage care under the new reality of lockdowns. Investments in telehealth and new virtual care technologies were made at a time when revenue from patient visits all but disappeared. Those investments helped support an increasingly digital health care system where many non-emergency patient needs can now be addressed from the comfort of home. Medicare's extension of telehealth benefits will help people living with chronic conditions to protect themselves from both COVID-19 infection and facilitate continuity of care so essential to health management. However, we are only part of the way there. We need our medical community to continue investing in the development of a virtual health care system that prioritizes digitally connected care for the next national health emergency, supported by appropriate reimbursement. Hospitals and hospital-based providers and staff have heroically responded and continue to respond to the pandemic. Proposed cuts in reimbursement would harm an already stretched system while we continue to demand so much from our health system partners. Rather, partnerships that support a virtual health care system to preserve coordinated care with greater flexibility among hospitals, physicians, suppliers, and others is the best way to ensure the safety of Americans in need of health care during a pandemic.
- 3. Domestic PPE Manufacturers.** Significant numbers of domestic manufacturing businesses were established in 2020 to help health care providers, other essential workers and members of the public protect themselves against exposure by securing

⁷ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/action/doSearch?AllField=lives+saved+covid+19>

masks, gloves, and other critical PPE supplies that were in shortage. While huge improvements in domestic PPE supply availability have been achieved, more work is needed to ensure this industry can remain viable. Requiring that the U.S. government purchase supplies domestically is imperative. The Biden Administration's "Buy American" executive order is a positive step to assuring domestic capacity in critical PPE supplies. The Senate's bipartisan infrastructure package takes another important step in reinforcing the need to support domestic supplies and requiring that domestic contracts extend for two years to improve continuity and predictability for manufacturers. The need for PPE exists to protect all Americans. Strong partnerships with domestic PPE manufacturers intended to ensure patient safety in times like these are critically important for our nation's health and security.

4. International Governments. America alone cannot prevent the next pandemic. COVID-19 provided great examples of geopolitical partnerships, including COVAX, formed to help share the expense and benefits of vaccine development and distribute supplies. We need the global community to work together to make sufficient investments at the country level to ease the burden on any one country and enhance global readiness. To better prevent global health crises in the future, international agreements are needed on such things as early warning systems to better predict emerging health threats, common legal protections for pandemic partners to encourage their continued collaboration, and increasingly needed investment in new innovations.

There is much work still to be done to respond to COVID-19 that will likely continue for years to come, but we cannot lose momentum on preparing for the next emergency— the costs of doing otherwise are just too high.

We, the undersigned, stand ready to partner with you on these and other aspects of pandemic preparedness and ask that you avoid policies that would undercut these vital industries as they continue to fight COVID-19 and prepare for future pandemics.

Thank you,

Alliance for Aging Research
American Mask Manufacturers Association
Caregiver Action Network
COSHAR Healthy Communities Foundation
Direct Primary Care Coalition
Healthcare Leadership Council
HealthyWomen
Incubate Coalition
Kimberly Coffey Foundation
NTM Info & Research
Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease
Partnership to Fight Infectious Disease
Population Health Alliance
Sepsis Alliance