

September 22, 2022

Dear President Biden and the White House COVID-19 Task Force:

Thank you for your engagement and leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) represents regional and national drug stores, supermarkets, and mass merchants with pharmacies. The fact that 90 percent of Americans live within five miles of a pharmacy has been cited frequently by government throughout the pandemic. This fact has brought hope, credibility, and results to the effort to provide vaccinations, testing, and other forms of care to all Americans – conveniently and equitably.

We are the trusted community healthcare partner to ensure that all Americans have access to the vital health information, therapies, and services they need.

From day one of the COVID-19 pandemic, our pharmacies, pharmacists, and pharmacy teams were there, lights on and doors open. They have initiated and expanded access to COVID-19 testing, provided over 266 million COVID-19 shots, and educated local communities about the safety, effectiveness and availability of vaccines. In fact, approximately 2 of every 3 COVID-19 vaccine doses are being provided at a pharmacy and more than 40 percent of individuals vaccinated for COVID-19 at a pharmacy are from racial and ethnic minority groups. Further, more than 40 percent of children ages 5 to 11 who have been vaccinated for COVID-19 did so at a pharmacy.

The Administration has been an advocate and champion alongside of our nation's pharmacies to ensure that vaccinations and important health information about the pandemic and other pressing health issues, like the flu, are shared in a trusted and equitable manner. As the White House COVID-19 Task Force has rightly communicated to the American public, we are now entering a new phase.

As we continue to roll out new bivalent COVID-19 booster shots to address COVID-19 variants and simultaneously prepare for what is predicted to be a particularly severe flu season, other challenges exist. We must prepare methodically for the formal conclusion of the federal public health emergency declaration and for a transition of COVID-19 vaccinations, testing and therapeutics to the commercial markets and coverage by Medicare, Medicaid, and private health insurers. We also need equitable and sustainable access solutions for the uninsured.

It would be deeply harmful to our nation's public health to hastily unravel the flexibilities that enable pharmacies to provide key services patients have come to expect and need.

On behalf of pharmacies and pharmacy teams operating in neighborhoods across the country, we want to continue partnering with the federal government to maintain vital access to healthcare.

We urge you to work with us, and to take sensible, proactive solutions that we have previously outlined to minimize future disruptions from COVID-19, to achieve better health for the country, and to remain prepared to respond to future public health threats. It is vital to:

- **Preserve Proven Methods:** Keep pharmacy personnel pandemic flexibilities in place at least through October 1, 2024. *Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP Act)* flexibilities

have allowed pharmacists and pharmacy teams to serve Americans effectively, conveniently and equitably.

- **Provide Guidance:** Release a detailed plan that is grounded in reality by which the administration will cover the costs of vaccinating, testing, and providing therapeutics to uninsured individuals. This has not been the case since funding for the uninsured ended for testing and therapeutics in late March 2022, and for vaccination administration in early April 2022.
- **Make Permanent:** Establish a reliable Medicare reimbursement pathway for pharmacy care services including vaccinations, testing, and therapeutics for COVID-19, flu, and other illnesses. Lack of this pathway today is generating real-world consequences – most notably, contributing to reduced access to lifesaving therapeutics. The key to this is enactment of H.R. 7213, the *Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act*.
- **Empower Therapeutics:** To date, the rollout of COVID-19 therapeutics has not fully reached the people who need them most – nor has the rollout effectively leveraged pharmacists, thus limiting the accessibility and equity of these medications. We have provided concrete recommendations of how to operationalize pharmacist prescribing which merit action.
- **Bolster Public Awareness:** With a transition of COVID-19 vaccinations, testing, and therapeutics from government-purchased product to the commercial markets, it is essential to provide a robust public education effort to ensure that patients understand how they will get their COVID-19 boosters – and other care – moving forward. This is especially important for vulnerable Americans who are underinsured or not insured, as their care will be impacted most heavily without further government intervention to cover these costs.

Over the course of many months, NACDS has emphasized these important steps. Most recently, on September 7, NACDS reiterated [detailed and comprehensive recommendations](#).

Ultimately, we share the goal of keeping all Americans safe and healthy. With the benefit of professionalism, expertise, and know-how from pharmacies, pharmacists, and pharmacy teams on the front lines of care, NACDS has throughout the past three years recommended actionable policies that have proven effective in serving rural and urban communities alike – including the most vulnerable. We will continue this mission to ensure all Americans continue to benefit from the care that they deserve based on lessons learned from the pandemic, and we hope you will join us.

We look forward to continuing to work together to preserve all Americans' health and wellbeing.

Sincerely,



Steven C. Anderson, FASAE, CAE, IOM
President and Chief Executive Officer