



June 23, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander,

On behalf of the Continuing Medical Education (CME) Coalition, we appreciate your efforts to address future pandemic planning efforts, particularly as it relates to improving our public health capacities. While there are many facets to effective public health preparedness, one area of acute need that has emerged during the current pandemic is the education of America's health provider workforce. While best practices for treating COVID-19 patients or adopting new telehealth capacities have rapidly evolved over the last several months, traditional funding sources for provider education have been decimated, limiting the availability of educational programming at a time when these activities are more important than ever. Therefore, we encourage you to prioritize the education of health care workers both in response to the current pandemic and as a key consideration for future pandemic preparedness.

The CME Coalition is comprised of continuing medical education providers, educational institutions, professional societies, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and device makers committed to reliably improving health professionals' knowledge and competence as they respond to the ever-changing world of medicine. Health care professionals (HCPs) are required to routinely participate in CME programs to maintain state licensure and certification, and rely on CME to continually improve their ability to best diagnose, treat, and care for patients. Over \$2.8 billion is invested in accredited CME annually, and the federal government has previously acknowledged the importance of medical education in improving public health through several existing federal programs. For example, titles III and VII of the Public Health Service Act supports awards to schools of medicine, osteopathic medicine, public health, and integrative medicine programs.

As treatment and care for COVID-19 patients continues to rapidly evolve in the coming months and years, CME will play a vital role in educating the millions of clinicians — from Emergency Medical Services personal to in-hospital health care workers to office-based physicians — on how best to diagnose and treat coronavirus patients. CME providers and medical societies have already held countless webinars, created educational courses, and distributed CDC guidance since the onset of the pandemic, however, the total cost of educating America's providers on the impact of COVID-19 on their practice is expected to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars *at least* — a sum that simply cannot be absorbed by traditional funders of CME. As a result of the severe financial stress impacting many hospitals, companies, and state governments, the traditional funding sources for CME have receded at a time of greatest need. Without immediate federal support, HCPs will not have access to the education and training they critically need, and patient care will suffer.

As established in your white paper on pandemic response efforts, the U.S. desperately needs to address increased training for the health care and public health workforce. We applaud your recommendation for solutions that allow state and local governments to better respond to future pandemics and urge you to consider supporting federal funding for CME training for health providers and public health workers on the front lines in our communities. Many states have faced workforce shortages and training needs on top of funding challenges and will require federal assistance to ensure they are best equipped with health professionals trained on best practices for pandemic response. Congress should acknowledge the crucial role of CME for the nation's health workforce by appropriating dedicated funding to facilitate continuing medical education initiatives related to COVID-19.

While the areas necessary for provider education are wide-ranging, there are several specific areas that have been identified as key areas for enhanced provider education in the wake of the pandemic:

- **Telemedicine** — The currently available education for telemedicine is not state specific and for the most part needs to be updated. Additional funding could be utilized to develop state-specific telemedicine education including liability, licensure consideration, proper techniques and considerations, billing, and coding.
- **Infection Control** — Large hospitals and facilities have infectious disease service. Ambulatory practices lack this service and would benefit from learning the proper use of personal protection equipment (PPE), how to disinfect exam rooms, and how to provide staff training.
- **Disease Diagnosis** — The need to diagnose COVID-19 will continue as practices reopen. In addition to learning how to use testing kits, there are other studies which should be done to determine whether patients can go home or need to be hospitalized. This is no small issue, as some patients deteriorate rapidly.
- **Disease Prevention and Management** — The field of COVID-19 prevention and management is evolving rapidly. The importance of clinicians staying current on the status of vaccines and therapeutics cannot be understated. Until such time as we have a widely available vaccine, clinicians need information on evidence-based management of COVID-19, including symptomatic treatment and antivirals.
- **Impact on Vulnerable Populations** — Health care professionals who routinely treat immunocompromised patients, such as oncologists and pulmonologists, need to be especially targeted for enhanced education on the potential impact of COVID-19 on their patients.

The deadly impact of COVID-19 will only continue to worsen if HCPs are not adequately trained to best treat patients with COVID-19 and are unprepared to address the myriad of chronic health consequences many patients may face after they recover from the infection. As such, we ask you to support America's physician workforce by providing targeted funding to facilitate critical CME initiatives related to COVID-19 and future pandemic response.

Sincerely,



Chris Lamond
Executive Director, CME Coalition
clamond@thornrun.com

CC: Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions