

A Plan for Pennsylvania's Health Care System and Providers: Relief, Reopening, Recovery

The Wolf Administration has undertaken every possible effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus and ensure our health care system, and the providers that make up its fabric, can withstand the ramp-up, surge, and aftermath of this deadly pandemic.

While hospitals and health systems have been promised significant financial aid from the federal government, many are facing financial strain now and need **relief** before those dollars become fully available. The Wolf Administration has taken steps to provide that immediate relief including:

- Establishing the Pennsylvania Hospital Emergency Loan Program (HELP) to provide up to \$450 million from the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVEST) in critical working capital bridge funding at a very low interest rate to Pennsylvania's hospitals.
- Spreading the word about the federal government's expansion of the Accelerated and Advance Payment Program for Providers and Suppliers, which provides necessary funds when there is a disruption in claims submission or processing. The expansion of this program extends to a broader group of Medicare Part A providers and Part B suppliers. The federal government announced that they have approved over \$51 billion for providers across the country in the first week of the expansion program.
- Worked closely with the General Assembly to transfer \$50 million in state funds to purchase medical equipment and supplies for hospitals, nursing homes, and emergency workers to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Worked with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to allow for payments for direct-support providers to assist people with disabilities in hospital settings where they may need support beyond that provided by hospital staff.
- Signed an Executive Order that allows the state to load-balance personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies should it become necessary as the coronavirus pandemic worsens. This action is intended to ensure that all health care providers have access to PPE and critical supplies and that if supplies need to be redistributed to meet the needs of communities hardest hit by the virus, it can be done efficiently and as quickly as possible.
- Supplied over 1.8 million N95 masks, 136,000 gowns, 912,000 procedure masks, 730,000 gloves, 990 goggles, and 147,000 face shields to health care workers.
- Waived requirements to allow for retired medical professionals to quickly reactivate their licenses in order to bolster the capacity of the health care workforce.
- Worked with medical schools across the commonwealth to allow Graduate Medical Trainees (GMTs) to obtain their GMT licenses upon graduation.
- Working to limit the scope of potential liability for health care providers resulting from the care of patients during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Contracted with ECRI, an independent, nonprofit health services research organization, to enlist experts in the field of infection control to help protect those in the state's long-term care facilities.
- Businesses across the commonwealth have pivoted from current business models to manufacture or produce personal protective equipment (PPE), gowns, masks, and other critical supplies meant to assist individuals and communities in responding to COVID-19.

- Collaborating with the Jewish Healthcare Foundation to support personal care homes and assisted living residences to provide information about infectious disease management protocols and resident care requirements.
- Partnering with university health systems to staff a phone line designed to answer specific COVID-19 related questions for these facilities and to provide real time support.

With new case counts showing that these aggressive efforts have flattened the curve, the Governor and his administration will begin to plan for a **reopening** process that protects Pennsylvanians and helps to stabilize the economy.

To that end, the Administration will work with economic and public health experts to determine the metrics used for safe reopening by taking a regional, sector-based approach. In consultation with Team PA, the Department of Health, the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, and others, the Administration will develop guidance for businesses, local governments, workers, customers, and others and guide a safe reopening process.

Reopening Principles

1. Our approach will be data driven and reliant upon quantifiable criteria to drive a targeted, evidence-based, regional approach to reopenings in Pennsylvania.
2. We will put forth guidance and recommendations for employers, individuals, and health care facilities and providers for assured accountability as we reopen.
3. Reopening necessitates that adequate personal protective equipment and diagnostic testing are available.
4. Reopening requires a monitoring and surveillance program that allows the commonwealth to deploy swift actions for containment or mitigation.
5. Protections for vulnerable populations must remain steadfast throughout the reopening process, such as limitations on visitors to congregate care facilities and prisons.
6. Limitations on large gatherings unrelated to occupations should remain in place for the duration of the reopening process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the fragmentations within our health systems. Pennsylvania has banded together to support and equip our hospitals and medical professionals with the tools they need to respond, but our **recovery** is dependent upon long-term policy change. A policy agenda to support the health and recovery of Pennsylvania's residents must include:

- Health care coverage for all Pennsylvanians that is affordable and transparent, and a system that allows for choice in coverage.
 - Ensuring the protections of the Affordable Care Act are in place at the state level, to ensure that people with pre-existing conditions, including Pennsylvanians recovered from COVID-19, can obtain full coverage and not worry about lifetime or annual caps on coverage should they need further care.
 - Making sure that patients who seek out in-network care aren't surprised with a bill for treatment by an out-of-network provider at an in-network facility.
 - Requiring transparency in short-term limited duration insurance products and protecting consumers who need to fill an unexpected gap in coverage.

- Further building on work the Administration has done to cut bureaucratic red tape and make it easier for new Pennsylvanians, including military spouses, with an out-of-state occupational license to work. Greater flexibility is needed in licensure requirements for a broad set of out of state practitioners interested in providing care in Pennsylvania.
- Continued telehealth expansion and adoption of telehealth as a primary mode of health care delivery for physical and mental health services as well as substance use disorder treatment. New telehealth policy should be inclusive of accessible modes of communication such as telephonic delivery when other means are unavailable. Additionally, telehealth services should be reimbursed at the same rates as if the services were delivered in person.
- Significant increases in housing services and investment in low-income housing development to reduce the number of Pennsylvanians unable to be safely discharged due to lack of shelter and to promote health and wellness in community settings.
- Continued prioritization of home and community-based services to reduce congregate placements for children, individuals with disabilities, and seniors.
- Increased and more formalized role for community-based organizations in health and wellness activities and health care delivery. This pandemic has made clear that health does not begin and end in the doctor's office, let alone in a hospital, and Pennsylvania's community-based organizations have an important role to play.