



March 11, 2020

Lewis Sandy, MD
Executive Vice President, Clinical Advancement
UnitedHealth Group
PO Box 1459
Minneapolis, MN 55440-1459

Dear Dr. Sandy:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents 134,600 family physicians and medical students across the country, I write to urge your partnership with family physicians to care for communities impacted by COVID-19.

Family physicians are the first line of defense in identifying and responding to patient needs in the community during this public health crisis. As such, it will be critical to limit the risk of person-to-person spread of the virus. We urge you to undertake the following initiatives to assist in that effort.

Align Telehealth Provisions with the CMS Directive

Telehealth plays a critical role by offering a safe and cost-effective means of caring for patients while reducing the unnecessary risk of transmission. The AAFP strongly urges UnitedHealth Group to align with the telehealth provisions of the [Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2020](#) to improve access to care with their primary care physician, speed diagnosis and treatment, and limit the risk of person-to-person spread of the virus.

Eliminate Out-of-Pocket Costs

We are encouraged that many payers are proactively taking steps to eliminate out-of-pocket costs associated with telehealth services. Likewise, out-of-pocket costs for evaluation and management services and diagnostic tests leading to COVID-19 diagnosis should be eliminated, as well. Evidence has shown that patients with out-of-pocket costs often delay or avoid getting the primary care they need, which can pose significant barriers for patients with chronic illness and diseases that need early detection. In addition to waiving these cost-sharing requirements, we urge UnitedHealth Group to communicate this information broadly to ensure that patients know that financial barriers will not interfere with their ability to be tested.

Parity for Telehealth Visits

The AAFP also is requesting that telehealth services be covered at the same payment level as in-person provider visits (i.e., at parity). We are encouraged that many payers have already announced their intent to implement such practices.

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Facilitate Expeditious Care

In the interest of treating patients quickly and effectively, the AAFP asks UnitedHealth Group to eliminate referral requirements or prior authorizations for screening and treatment related to COVID-19; specifically relating to hospitalization, post-acute care, and medical equipment needed in the home. Removing these administrative barriers will ensure that patients are able to be treated quickly and in the appropriate site of care to minimize further exposure and poor outcomes.

Increased Medication Access

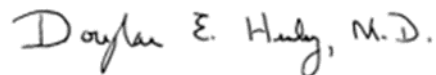
Finally, the AAFP asks UnitedHealth Group to increase access to prescription medications by waiving early medication refill limits on 30-day prescriptions maintenance medications. Doing so will reduce unnecessary visits and exposure to potential illness.

Communicate Effectively with Physician Community

While UnitedHealth Group has made announcements in terms of COVID-19 coverage, the AAFP continues to have payment policy questions, including the types of diagnostic tests covered as patients may be required to test for influenza or strep prior to being tested for COVID-19. We strongly recommend that UnitedHealth Group clearly post and communicate what services and diagnostic tests are covered, any cost-sharing that may be waived, and the applicable plan types. Helping patients and physicians understand UnitedHealth Group's coverage and payment policies related to COVID-19 can ensure patients do not delay care because of concerns about out-of-pocket costs.

We look forward to your partnership as we seek to address this public health crisis and look forward to UnitedHealth Group's response. For additional information or follow-up, please contact Brennan Cantrell, Commercial Health Insurance Strategist, at the AAFP, at 913-906-6172, or by email at bcantrell@aafp.org.

Sincerely,



Douglas E. Henley, MD, FAAFP Executive Vice President/CEO

Cc: Brennan Cantrell, Commercial Health Insurance Strategist