March 2, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

Mr. Secretary:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced that the community transmission of SARS-CoV-2, in the United States, is imminent. This announcement was followed by an announcement from President Trump regarding the formation of a government-wide effort to harness and distribute resources in response to COVID-19.

Mr. Secretary, should there be wide-spread community transmission, many, if not all, of the individuals who believe they may have COVID-19 will seek care from their family physician or other community primary care physicians. The prospect of large numbers of people simultaneously seeking care has the potential to overwhelm the primary care system in most communities. It is imperative that we take the necessary steps to integrate family physician offices with federal agencies and public health efforts, including the distribution of information on evolving testing, vaccination and treatment. Furthermore, the primary care safety net must be considered when distributing emergency funding as part of the HHS Covid-19 response.

Family physicians across the nation are seeking information that will prepare them to appropriately provide care to impacted individuals and communities. Our members, however, are growing concerned about the current and future availability of diagnostic tests and supplies (gowns, masks, gloves). They also are concerned that many physicians and their care teams may be impacted by the virus necessitating quarantine, thus rendering them unavailable to deliver care to their patients and communities. Finally, there is growing concerns about the economic impact a pandemic would have on the financial health of family medicine practices, many of whom are currently at the edge of economic viability.

We encourage you to quickly communicate with AAFP members and other physicians to address these and other relevant questions as quickly as possible. The timely distribution of information will assist our members as they prepare to provide timely, compassionate and appropriate care to any and all individuals impacted by COVID-19.
The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) is standing ready to assist the Department of Health & Human Service (HHS) and the CDC in preparing family physicians and the primary care system in managing this situation.

Sincerely,

John S. Cullen, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair