



December 23, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Azar:

The American Academy of Family Physicians represents the nation's more than 136,000 family physicians who are on the frontlines of the American health care system leading the fight against COVID-19. These are the same physicians who are also providing care to the millions of children and adults who have health care needs unrelated to COVID-19.

We are writing to express our deepest concerns that these essential community physicians and their practices have not been incorporated in the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans. We call on the federal and state governments to take appropriate actions to prioritize community primary care physicians and their practices in vaccination strategies. To accomplish this, we urge you to work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Governors to ensure that plans for the allocation, distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccines appropriately accelerate distribution to community primary care physicians and their practices.

Our members are the foundation of our health care system and we should, as a matter of public policy, protect them from this virus so they can safely provide care to the millions of patients they care for each day. In fact, nearly 200 million individuals see a family physician each year and more than 500 million patient visits are made to primary care practices annually. The overwhelming majority of visits to a physician in the United States are to a primary care physician and most likely to a family physician. This is why it is imperative that we prioritize these physicians and their practices for vaccination. The faster we vaccinate all primary care physicians and their teams, the faster they can safely provide care to their communities.

We also encourage enhanced coordination with community-based family medicine practices as part of your vaccine distribution strategies. Our members are committed to ensuring equitable access to the vaccines for all, but we know the ultimate success of this effort will hinge on widespread coordination and communication with all stakeholders but especially primary care physicians and practices – especially in rural and underserved communities. As we previously stated, failure to meaningfully incorporate family medicine and primary care into distribution and education efforts will jeopardize the ultimate success of vaccination strategies.

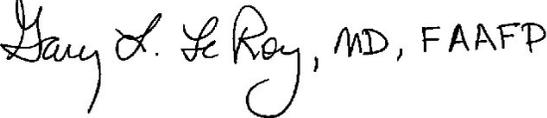
In closing, we stress that the federal government and the individual states must do all they can to facilitate the immediate and broad vaccination of community-based primary care physicians and their practices. Failure to do so will further compromise the safety of patients who are seeking care for both COVID and non-COVID health issues.

STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. We stand ready to assist you in informing the nation's primary care physicians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "G" and "L".

Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair, American Academy of Family Physicians