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June 2, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary, U.S. Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Provider Relief Fund Allocations to Aid Independent Primary Care

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Primary care is critical to a high-value health care system. Primary care providers are the professionals on whom we rely for timely evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, and referral. Currently, our primary care system is imperiled, as the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe decrease in non-COVID-19 visits deplete revenues for independent primary care practices.

I am writing on behalf of the St. Louis Area Business Health Coalition (BHC), which represents a membership of more than seventy leading employers and over a million health plan enrollees nationwide. The BHC is concerned that independent, primary care practices may be forced to close their doors or join the tide of consolidation into large health systems and private equity concerns. Experience tells us that when large health systems or private equity purchases these independent primary care practices, there is an increase in cost and no improvement in care.

The BHC therefore requests that the HHS immediately make Provider Relief Fund (PRF) appropriations to primary care clinicians and practices that are not owned by private equity firms or by large health systems that have already received federal support. The BHC urges that HHS ensure taxpayers receive an appropriate return for the investment of PRF dollars by requiring all providers to cap pricing at current levels during calendar years 2020 and 2021 as a condition of receiving this funding.

The cost in lives lost and increased illness burden will be great if scores of Americans lose access to primary care. The BHC therefore urges the HHS to make immediate PRF allocations to preserve independent primary care practices, and to use this historical opportunity to reorient our health care system toward primary care as the key driver of value and access.

Sincerely,



Michael Hely
Senior Director, Legal and Policy Services