



Texas Association of Health Plans

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**Texas Association of Health Plans Testimony
House Public Health Committee
Re: Coronavirus Preparedness**

March 10, 2020

Chairwoman Thompson, Committee Members:

Thank you for inviting the Texas Association of Health Plans (TAHP) to testify on the COVID-19 situation. TAHP represents health insurers, health maintenance organizations, and other related health care entities that operate in Texas through employer-sponsored coverage, the individual insurance market, and public programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.

TAHP and its member health plans are preparing for the potential widespread transmission of the coronavirus in Texas and are taking action to mitigate the impact of such an event. Our priority is protecting the health and well-being of the Texans we serve. Texas health plans are taking decisive action to help prevent the spread of this disease, to ensure that people have coverage for and access to needed testing, and to help patients who are infected receive the care and treatment they need.

Specifically, Texas health plans are taking critical steps to:

- 1. Work with public and private-sector partners to implement solutions so that out-of-pocket costs are not a barrier to people seeking testing for, and treatment of, COVID-19**
 - Health plans will cover needed diagnostic testing when ordered by a physician and treatment of the illness. Plans will take action to ease network, referral, and prior authorization requirements and/or waive patient cost-sharing. Additionally, Texas Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) plans will work with the state to implement waivers of federal cost-sharing requirements as directed. Plans will also take action to ensure patients have continuous access to their regular prescription medications while avoiding potential problems such as drug shortages.
 - Plans will help develop solutions for state and federal policymakers to provide more guidance and more flexibility so that changes to preventive services, benefit design, and treatment options can help people immediately.

- 2. Partner with doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers to ensure effective treatment is available for those who are infected.**
 - Health plans are sharing information with clinicians, mobilizing network providers, and coordinating care management programs to ensure providers have the best available data to identify, diagnose, and treat infections.

- Plans will work to coordinate effective communication across plans and providers to guarantee patients receive the highest quality coverage and care.
 - Plans are encouraging the use of telehealth, at-home care, and other technology-enabled options to expand access to care and reduce the risk of infection.
 - Plans are providing highly coordinated coverage and care for the populations most at risk for complications as a result of COVID-19, including seniors and people with chronic conditions.
 - Health plans are also providing emotional support services.
- 3. Educate the people we serve on how to prevent the spread of this disease, how to access testing and care, and about their coverage.**
- Health plans are following guidance from and working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); federal agencies and task forces; and, necessary partners in states, cities, and counties across the country to coordinate efforts, share information, mitigate health risks, and keep Texans informed.
 - Plans are leveraging their medical staffs to provide employees, including clinical staff, with updated information on the outbreak, symptoms, and appropriate next steps.
 - Plans are proactively engaging their members—particularly those who are most at-risk for infection such as seniors and patients with chronic diseases—on common-sense steps everyone can take to reduce the risk of infection.
- 4. Work closely with appropriate state and national agencies and partners to ensure quick and coordinated communication.**
- Health plans are monitoring for any state emergency declarations and/or TDI bulletins addressing coverage.
 - Plans are partnering with the CDC and other clinical experts to coordinate on up-to-the-minute best practices and procedures.
 - Plans are participating in state and national communication channels to stay informed of the rapidly changing situation and sharing valuable information.
- 5. Review and update contingency plans to ensure continuity of care and coverage for Texans.**
- Health plans have business continuity strategies in place that address accommodating potential employee impact, continuing operations in the event of a pandemic, and implementing best steps to keep communities healthy.
 - Plans are ensuring that their contingency and preparedness plans are up to date and adding more customer service resources so that phone calls are answered, and staff nurse lines and member chat services are available.



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TAHP, its member companies, and their employees are heavily invested in the health of the communities they live in and serve. We are fully committed to meeting this challenge. Working together with federal, state, and community leaders; clinicians; pharmacies; drug makers; medical equipment providers; and other essential partners, TAHP and its members are confident we can collectively overcome this challenge and keep Texans safe and healthy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie Dudensing". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Dudensing, RN
CEO, Texas Association of Health Plans