

December 10, 2020

Open Letter to United States Governors

Prioritizing Community-based, Not-for-Profit Hospices in COVID-19 Vaccine Distributions

Governors,

On behalf of the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation (NPHI), we would like to thank you and your administrations for your leadership in and commitment to combating the COVID-19 public health emergency. As we approach the new year, and with FDA emergency use authorization of several vaccine candidates imminent, ***we write to you today to emphasize the importance of prioritizing community-based, not-for-profit hospice and palliative care providers in your vaccine distribution plans.*** These programs have worked and continue to work tirelessly to provide the best possible patient care, while taking precautions to avoid the spread of the virus. However, they need your support through priority distribution of effective COVID-19 vaccines and other essential supplies. Prioritizing vaccination of these front-line workers will be essential to supporting their core mission as they meet the needs of patients in long-term care facilities and home- and community-based settings.

NPHI is a collaborative of over seventy of the nation's most innovative, community-based, not-for-profit hospice and palliative care providers that serve as a critical safety net in communities across the United States. Our members collectively serve approximately 120,000 patients daily. Of the almost 4,700 hospice providers in the United States, only 27 percent are not-for-profit and serve the sickest and most vulnerable patients. NPHI members are deeply embedded in their communities and have decades of experience providing the highest quality care for people facing serious illness. This includes providing a comprehensive scope of care to meet each patient's goals, values, and wishes, regardless of the patient's financial situation or their terminal condition.

Last week the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) released interim recommendations for allocating initial supplies of COVID-19 vaccine. The committee determined that upon FDA emergency use authorization, residents of long-term care facilities and health care personnel should be offered vaccines first in the initial phase of a comprehensive COVID-19 vaccination program. We urge you to recognize hospice and palliative providers as key components of the care provided to residents of long-term care facilities by including them as part of your priority distribution plans. As you know, hospice and palliative care providers meet the needs of their patients and caregivers regardless of the site of care. Our programs focus on delivering care in the comfort of a patient's home but also have deep experience and connections with local nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, hospital inpatient units, and other institutional settings. In order to maintain safe and effective access to long-term facilities, hospice providers must be prioritized in your distribution plans.

Community-based, not-for-profit hospice and palliative care programs specifically serve a unique and essential role in their communities, which speaks to the need to prioritize their distribution. These types of programs invest heavily in providing exceptional patient care. For example, most of our members have invested in free-standing inpatient units for their hospice patients, which they have recently leveraged to allocate beds and units to treat seriously ill patients with COVID-19. But, they generally lack the economic scale and leverage needed to procure essential supplies to respond to COVID-19. By targeting supplies to these programs, you will make the largest impact within your states by addressing these unmet needs.

NPHI applauds the effort of state and local officials in combating the spread of COVID-19. Fortunately, as we continue to receive positive news regarding the development, authorization, and distribution of vaccines and additional therapeutics, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Together as partners, we can reach that light through your much needed support for community-based, not-for-profit programs. Once again, thank you for your leadership in supporting the safe, effective, and equitable distribution of forthcoming COVID-19 vaccines. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue further, please contact me at tomk@hospiceinnovations.org.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Koutsoumpas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Koutsoumpas".

Tom Koutsoumpas
President and CEO
NPHI