

## COVID-19 Weekly Public Policy Recap

April 24, 2020

### **Congressional Updates**

Congress officially passed interim COVID-19 relief aid on Thursday after a weeks-long battle. The billions in aid includes \$300 billion for the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program including money specifically for small banks, \$50 billion for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan, \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for testing. The bill was signed Friday morning by President Trump. Read a summary of the bill [here](#) and a breakdown of HHS funding [here](#).

With supplemental funding secured, all eyes will turn to the next round of relief aid. Democratic leadership wants a robust package to address the issues they've conceded on in other packages, including patient protections, but Senate Majority Leader McConnell wants to press the pause button – now pointing to the impact on the national debt.

Among the proposals for the next package is a bill to provide \$55 billion per year to hire hundreds of thousands of workers for a "Health Force" who would do tracing, testing, and vaccination. Weighing in, President Trump called this week for a new bill providing aid to state and local governments, infrastructure spending, a payroll tax cut and tax breaks for restaurants, sports and entertainment interests. Meanwhile, other Members of Congress are calling for a variety of policies including expanded paid family and medical leave, protection of research funding, direct aid for non-profit organizations, additional and sustained direct payments to individuals, and expansion of COBRA to cover the full cost premiums for those who lose their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Remote voting and debate was delayed this week but the House passed along party lines a measure to establish a coronavirus select committee. The panel will be led by Majority Whip James Clyburn and include as many as 12 members appointed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and as many as five appointed by Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy. The select subcommittee's purpose is to investigate the use of taxpayer funds for relief and stimulus spending, allegations of price gouging and profiteering, federal programs to expand virus testing and develop vaccines, and disparate effects of the virus on communities in the U.S., among other issues. The panel has the authority to issue subpoenas.

### **Administration Updates**

#### *Testing*

The testing debate continued this week as White House officials reported the country is already producing enough tests to enter "phase one" of a reopening plan. Experts say that a robust testing system is required to have enough knowledge about population health for reopening measures. Yet estimates say the country needs at least three times more tests to be able to safely reopen. Former FDA chief Scott Gottlieb estimated we won't have the needed testing capacity until September.

The Food and Drug Administration announced this week that they have approved an at-home coronavirus test. It will be made available first to healthcare workers and first responders and is expected to go on sale to consumers within weeks. The test, called Pixel, is a nasal swab kit developed and sold by LabCorp. Patients will collect their own samples using a special sterile swab provided in the

kit and then send it in to one of the company's labs for analysis. A doctors order will be required and the kit costs \$119 up front to be reimbursed later by insurance providers.

### *Treatment and Therapies*

A panel of U.S. physicians, statisticians, and other experts has developed treatment guidelines for COVID-19, considering antivirals, host-modifiers, and immune-based therapies. The guidelines give recommendations for patient evaluation and treatment based on risk and severity of illness and best practices based on the stage of disease. These guidelines are posted on the NIH [website](#) and will be updated often as new data are published in peer-reviewed scientific literature and other authoritative information emerges.

Meanwhile, Hydroxychloroquine was back in the news as a Veterans Health Administration analysis found the two primary outcomes for COVID-19 patients treated with hydroxychloroquine were death and the need for mechanical ventilation. The retrospective study of 368 patients is the largest study of its kind on the anti-malarial drug anywhere in the world. Patient communities that use hydroxychloroquine, like those with lupus and arthritis, have experienced significant shortages and insurance barriers for the use of their drugs after the FDA used its emergency authority to permit the use for COVID-19. On Friday the FDA released a [Drug Safety Communication](#).

### *CARES Act Actions*

The Department of Health and Human Services announced additional allocations to the Public Health Emergency Fund providing details on how CARES Act funding is being distributed. Medicare facilities and providers have been allocated \$50 billion, hospitals in high-risk areas will receive \$10 billion, Indian Health Service facilities will receive \$400 million, and funds will be allocated for the treatment of COVID-19 for uninsured patients to reimburse healthcare providers at Medicare rates.

After many small businesses and nonprofits reported difficulty in securing funds through the Paycheck Protection Program, the Treasury Department on issued guidance today making it much harder for publicly traded companies to qualify for money that was supposed to go to small businesses, threatening penalties in some cases if firms didn't repay money they had already received. And the Federal Reserve announced that it would be disclosing the names of companies that receive funding from some of its assistance programs in an effort to increase transparency.

### **State Updates**

Georgia came under pressure this week to reconsider its plans to begin allowing some businesses to open at the end of the week, even as the state has seen an uptick in coronavirus cases. Republican senators, former Trump administration officials, health experts, Georgia mayors and Democrats are expressing outrage and concern, saying Governor Brian Kemp, a Republican, is risking an explosion of new coronavirus cases that could lead to a second economic shutdown for the state.

Missouri became the first state in the nation to file a lawsuit against Beijing over its response to the coronavirus, which originated in Wuhan, China, and has since infected more than 2.5 million people worldwide. The lawsuit, filed by Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt (R) in the Eastern District of Missouri, seeks damages to make up for "the enormous loss of life, human suffering, and economic turmoil" resulting from the pandemic.

New York City will create its own stockpile of medical supplies after Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) said Tuesday that the city “can’t depend on the federal government.” De Blasio announced the development of the local stockpile at his Tuesday press conference, saying it will include surgical gowns, test kits and ventilators. The city will still purchase necessary medical supplies from outside vendors.

Governors began to announce timelines for relaxing strict measures taken to mitigate the coronavirus. Many states are dropping stay-at-home orders beginning May 1, while several states have not yet announced an end to restrictions. [Here are the reopening timelines announced so far by all 50 states and the District of Columbia.](#)

### **Recent Komen Engagement**

This week Komen engaged our grassroots network calling on our elected officials to prioritize the needs of those impacted by breast cancer in the next aid package. If you haven’t already, please be sure to [take action](#) by contacting your federal lawmakers to request key patient protections are included in the next legislative package.

On Thursday, Komen hosted a public policy and advocacy Twitter chat discussing legislative and regulatory policies that have been enacted since the beginning of the pandemic, especially those impacting people with breast cancer. Policy experts Johanna Gray of Artemis Policy Group and Colorado Lt. Governor Diana Primavera weighed in for a stimulating conversation. Check out the [Komen Advocacy Twitter](#) page for the highlights.

Finally, Komen joined other patient advocacy organizations in signing onto a statement of support for H.R.6514, the Worker Health Coverage Protection Act which provides subsidies to furloughed or terminated employees for the full cost of COBRA premiums.

### **In Other News**

- [U.S. Coronavirus Death Toll Tops 50,000](#)
- [Don’t inject disinfectants, Lysol warns as Trump raises idea](#)
- [New data on Gilead’s remdesivir, released by accident, show no benefit for coronavirus patients. Company still sees reason for hope](#)
- [Battle lines forming over next round of coronavirus aid](#)
- [No change in Social Security, Medicare finances, for now](#)
- [Abbott’s Fast COVID Test Poses Safety Issues, Lab Workers Say](#)