



April 20, 2020

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor of the State of Washington
Via email

Dear Governor Inslee,

On behalf of the Association of Washington Healthcare Plans (AWHP), its member companies, and the seven million Washingtonians we have the honor to serve, we want to thank you for your leadership during these uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also want to thank you for continuing the important conversation on how to ensure our health care system remains stable and meets the needs of all Washingtonians.

AWHP would like to express our gratitude to our health care partners for their work and sacrifice. We applaud the hospital funding efforts taken in the third legislative package addressing COVID-19 (CARES Act H.R. 748) and we are encouraged to see that HHS has begun allocating the \$100 billion emergency funding for hospitals and providers. AWHP also supports the recent significant increases in funding through higher Medicare reimbursements, suspension of sequestration cuts, expansion of the hospital accelerated payment program and the additional delay of Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital cuts. Locally, health plans have participated in the Washington Healthcare Forum COVID-19 Administration & Billing Workgroup to streamline administrative processes for providers.

While responding to this crisis has been challenging for all in the health care industry – and we recognize more will need to be done moving forward – we want to share the innovative actions Washington's health plans have taken in the past weeks to support our members, provider partners, communities and employees while also efficiently implementing and in some cases exceeding the emergency actions taken by various state and federal agencies. This includes the following:

Support for our Members

- Waiving prior authorization and member cost-sharing for any COVID-related screening, testing, and treatment
- Changing employer sponsored health plans so employers can keep their employees covered during this period, through actions such as reducing the number of hours employees must work to be eligible for benefits, covering former employees, creating special enrollment periods, and deferring employer premiums for 60 days
- Distributing gift cards to members to help pay for basic needs, including groceries, toiletries, and hygiene products
- Providing smart phones to help with telehealth use with unlimited minutes through the end of May and doubled available data
- Allowing for early prescription refills and delivery
- Increasing resources for high risk pregnancies including telephonic care management
- Delivering care packages for members that have been released from the hospital following COVID-19 treatment

Support for Provider Partners

- Ensuring full provider reimbursements for waived member cost-sharing for COVID-19 testing and treatment
- Expanding telehealth services and increasing reimbursement rates to allow both medical and behavioral providers to continue treating patients
- Accelerating claims payments and/or advancing revenue to providers
- Reducing prior authorization requirements
- Extending authorizations for elective surgeries, procedures, physical therapy, speech therapy, DME and occupational therapy that were scheduled to expire
- Making donations for the purchase of personal protective equipment to community providers
- Streamlining provider credentialing
- Working with targeted financially fragile Medicaid Behavioral Health Providers to offer and implement reimbursement stabilization options
- Suspending overpayment collections systems

Support for our Communities

- Donating personal care items to community partners
- Distributing meals to multiple groups including high risk pregnancy members and senior citizens
- Accelerating and increasing donations to nonprofits on the front line of the crisis, including to community foundations aiming to assist health districts and providers and organizations that support seniors
- Working to assist in meeting the needs of Washington's homeless population
- Establishing a COVID relief fund that is directing significant financial resources directly to food agencies and shelters to address the increased demand for housing and food

Support for our Employees

- Quickly and efficiently transitioning the vast majority of employees to virtual work in order to support physical distancing policies
- Supporting clinical employees that want to volunteer in the medical reserve force by allowing up to three months paid leave
- Providing employees with additional compensation and paid leave to assist with COVID-19-related expenses

Our first priority during this uncertain time remains working to ensure that members and their families have access to the care they need when they need it. Prospectively, continued stabilization efforts will be important. While hospitals and providers are experiencing the impact of COVID-19 more immediately, these are unprecedented circumstances for every participant in health care delivery and financing. The financial pressures that we all face are complicated yet interconnected, and the downstream impact for health plans remains largely unknown. There is limited data on the severity of COVID-19 claims costs at this time, and, depending on the length of the crisis and the impact on the economy and state budget, health plans could see significant losses in premium revenue that jeopardize our ability to meet consumers' needs.

With so much uncertainty, it is essential to stabilize and strengthen current health insurance coverage for the millions of Washingtonians who rely on employer-sponsored coverage, purchase as individuals or rely on the Medicaid program. We believe policymakers at the state and federal levels should continue to take action to help consumers maintain the health insurance coverage they have and access to care they need.

Washington's health plans remain committed to being constructive partners with your Administration, Insurance Commissioner Kreidler, the Health Care Authority, the Health Benefit Exchange, legislators and our provider partners so the entire health care delivery system can unite to overcome this crisis. We must continue to work together to ensure Washingtonians get the care they need, that all care providers have the resources they need to succeed, and that we strengthen the health care system and sources of coverage we have today.

Governor Inslee, thank you again continued leadership during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Bandoli". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Bandoli
AWHP Executive Director

Cc:

Mike Kreidler, Insurance Commissioner of Washington State
Sue Birch, Director of the Washington Health Care Authority
Pam MacEwan, CEO of the Washington Health Benefit Exchange
Laurie Jenkins, Speaker of the House of Representatives
JT Wilcox, House Minority Leader
Andy Billig, Senate Majority Leader
Mark Schoesler, Senate Minority Leader
Eileen Cody, Chair, House Health Care & Wellness Committee
Joe Schmick, Ranking Member, House Health Care & Wellness Committee
Annette Cleveland, Chair, Senate Health & Long-term Care Committee
Steve O'Ban, Ranking Member, Senate Health & Long-term Care Committee