

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 31, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma:

We write today in the interest of expanding access to care for our constituents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Medicaid plays a key safety net role in our society, one that is certain to become even more important as the economic fallout of this crisis unfolds. Key waivers can be used to expand eligibility and facilitate enrollment during emergency situations, and we ask that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issue further clarification to states to expand coverage opportunities.

Medicaid plays an essential role in improving the health of Americans by ensuring that vulnerable communities have access to health insurance coverage. Since Medicaid is a countercyclical program, we are likely to see an increase in eligible individuals as the economy slows in response to the coronavirus. In the face of this national emergency, it is critical that Americans face minimal barriers to accessing health services.

Current statute already allows for states to forgo Medicaid eligibility rules and processes through waivers. As you noted in your guidance issued on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Section 1115 waivers allow for states to conduct new demonstrations on program implementation. These waivers have been used by New York in 2001 to provide relief after 9/11 and by various states after hurricanes to streamline eligibility and enrollment<sup>1</sup>. It is critical that CMS further detail states' options to simplify the enrollment process such as lowering eligibility requirements, shorter applications and determination periods, and transition options for after the waiver period has ended. While this guidance includes important flexibilities, the late issuance has already cost states valuable time. In this rapidly evolving situation, the Administration should promptly take every step to cut red tape and increase access to Medicaid.

At this perilous moment, the federal government should be a reliable resource for state governments, not only in the direct response to the pandemic, but by ensuring that every possible policy option is explored and made available to states. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you to safeguard the health of all of our constituents.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Issue-Brief-How-Can-Medicaid-Enhance-State-Capacity-to-Respond-to-COVID-19.pdf>

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