

February 23, 2021

The Honorable Dennis R. Schrader
Secretary of Health
Maryland Department of Health
Herbert R. O'Connor State Office Building
201 West Preston Street
Baltimore, MD 21201 – 2399

Re: COVID-19 Vaccines

Dear Secretary Schrader:

On behalf of Maryland's physicians, MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, would like to make the following comments regarding the COVID-19 vaccine distribution throughout the state of Maryland:

First and foremost, MedChi applauds the Maryland State Government and the Maryland Department of Health for your tireless efforts to vaccinate the people of Maryland. In addition to intentional discussions of health equity in distribution, we understand that efficient rollout requires the mobilization of the entire public health infrastructure—from central hubs like hospitals to community-based sites like independent pharmacies. Furthermore, we appreciate the regular update calls you have scheduled and the weekly Department of Health updates that Howard Haft, MD has been providing.

As vaccine distribution efforts continue throughout the state of Maryland and nationwide, MedChi would like to reiterate our recommendation for full consideration of our physician practices and clinics as potential sites alongside our pharmacy and hospital colleagues. As you are aware, over 350 Maryland practices have signed up and been approved for COVID vaccine distribution through the State System IMMUNET. Maryland physicians are ready and willing to help with this effort.

In particular, our physician practices may facilitate vaccination rollout by offering the following:

1. **The trusted physician-patient relationship.** For many patients, both within and beyond the state of Maryland, medical group practices and clinics are their first touch point with the healthcare system—before the hospital or the pharmacy. Likewise, patients trust their physicians to answer questions about vaccine safety and efficacy. Including physician practices would thereby help streamline vaccine rollout by leveraging this unique relationship.
2. **Help with equity and inclusion with distribution.** Physicians will be able to help get underserved and traditionally disadvantaged groups of patients vaccinated. Currently it seems that certain populations are not getting vaccinated as quickly as other. This is of

grave concern to MedChi, and we have raised the issue as early as December. We suggest that we immediately identify physician offices in underserved areas to provide vaccine and improve those populations' uptake.

3. **The ability to softly prioritize patients according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations.** Our physicians know their patients and may be able to efficiently prioritize our patients for the vaccine, especially those who have pre-existing conditions and may be missed by our pharmacist colleagues. We urge the inclusion of medical group practices in the distribution plan to facilitate the strategic identification of eligible patients by age, pre-existing conditions, and other risk factors.
4. **Freezers equipped to properly store both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.** Many physician practices and clinics are either finishing or have already completed their annual influenza vaccine allotment, and thus have the staff and storage to safely administer the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Involving physician practices would therefore reduce the chances of vaccine doses being stored and at risk for spoilage.

MedChi understands that the plan is to bring on physicians as soon as more vaccine is available. MedChi also understands that many of the decisions regarding chain pharmacies and distribution were mandated or made early on by the Trump Administration. However, we think adding physician practices to the army of vaccinators can only help with various public health problems related to COVID-19 and thus we kindly urge your consideration to speed up the inclusion of physician and medical group practices in ongoing vaccination distribution efforts. Alongside our pharmacist, public health, and hospitalist colleagues, we are eager to vaccinate the people of Maryland.

Thank you for all you are doing to help with this public health crisis. These comments are made in the spirit of the collaborative relationship we have had during this entire process.

Sincerely,

Gene M. Ransom, III
Chief Executive Officer
MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society