



May 7, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education and Related Agencies  
136 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education and Related Agencies  
160 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

We are writing to respectfully request that you include \$71 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in the next FY20 emergency supplemental appropriations bill. This funding will support evaluations and research related to the health care system's response to the COVID-19 virus.

COVID-19 is a watershed moment for our country. The United States health care system must quickly learn from and adjust to what's happening now so that we can respond better and more quickly in the event of a recurrence or in response to the next pandemic. In particular, we must quickly and carefully conduct assessments of the health care system's response to COVID-19 with a particular focus on identifying successful and scalable measures taken to address this crisis.

AHRQ is the only federal agency whose sole focus is to generate reliable research on how to deliver the highest quality care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes to all patients. It is the only agency that funds research on the "real-world" patient—the one who doesn't have diabetes alone, for example, but also has cardiovascular disease and renal disease; or the patient who has cancer, as well as heart disease. AHRQ-funded research and databases allow us to understand where waste, inefficiencies, and gaps exist within the health care system, and allows patients, payers, providers, and others to harness American innovation and make the health care system safer, more efficient, and more effective. This research and focus makes AHRQ indispensable in our efforts to respond to, understand, and mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in our

health care system. No other HHS agency is currently engaged in evaluating the health care sector's response to this pandemic.

In particular, we believe the following issues require in-depth research and analysis:

- the rapid expansion of telehealth in response to social distancing policies, including identifying obstacles to access for veterans, the elderly, and low income communities, and gaps in compliance with health care privacy and security rules;
- the deficiencies in the health care system's supply chain that have manifested in ventilator and personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages, and;
- the shortfalls in health care delivery planning, coordination, and capacity.

AHRQ's research will uniquely focus on how health care systems and professionals responded to this crisis, how they successfully reorganized care delivery and care across a variety of settings, and what unmet delivery needs must be addressed. The results of these investments will guide health care policy making and delivery system operations, helping the nation learn from its experiences meeting the COVID-19 challenge and better preparing us to meet a future crisis.

AHRQ has the mandate and proven track record to deliver timely results that identify what works – and what doesn't – in health care delivery. The Agency should have the funds to begin to assess the impact of the changes made to law, regulation and medical practice immediately. We urge you to include the \$71 million in funding for AHRQ within the next COVID19 response package. Thank you for your time and attention to our request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Senator Richard Blumenthal

/s/ Senator Chris Van Hollen

/s/ Senator Dianne Feinstein

/s/ Senator Elizabeth Warren

/s/ Senator Michael Bennet