



Primary Care for America

August 24, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

As you are well aware, the United States, despite spending twice as much on a per capita basis on healthcare, experiences marginal health outcomes as compared to other industrialized nations¹. The underlying causes are also well known, and our inability to take appropriate actions have grave consequences. Our population is aging and growing less healthy – six in ten American adults have one or more chronic conditions and four in ten adults have two or more.

Our current healthcare system is expensive, fragmented, difficult to navigate, and introduces incentives that compete with our individual health interests. The current system promotes and finances much of this dysfunction. Taken together, our health care system too frequently works against the patient and their healthcare needs – despite the trillions of dollars spent on health nationally.

We have long recognized the value of primary care to individual patients, communities and our healthcare system. Despite this knowledge, as a country, we continue to overinvest in healthcare as a commodity and underinvest in primary care as a relationship – one that we know leads to greater health outcomes. Today, the United States allocates between 4% and 6% of its healthcare resources to comprehensive and continuous primary care – significantly less than other countries¹ and significantly less than what is needed for the United States to achieve a high-functioning health care system that delivers quality and value to individuals and communities.

To truly achieve a high-quality, high-value healthcare system, we must first commit ourselves to investing more in our primary care system. This is why our organizations launched [Primary Care for America](#), a new collaborative initiative aimed at promoting and positioning comprehensive, continuous, and coordinated primary care as the necessary foundation of our healthcare system. We articulated our vision for a better healthcare system in a [June 18th OpEd in Politico](#).

Our organizations have assembled at a pivotal time in the history of primary care. The COVID pandemic has underscored the vital role primary care plays in the health of individuals and communities and has demonstrated the critical need to ensure a robust foundation of primary care for our healthcare system and our country.

However, the COVID pandemic also exposed the vulnerabilities of our current primary care system.

- Increases in health disparities were seen in both rural and urban areas (Souch and Cossman, 2020)

¹ Eric C. Schneider et al., *Mirror, Mirror 2021 — Reflecting Poorly: Health Care in the U.S. Compared to Other High-Income Countries* (Commonwealth Fund, Aug. 2021). <https://doi.org/10.26099/01dv-h208>

- Over half (56%) of primary care clinicians saw an increase in negative impact on patients' health (Etz, R, 2020).
- Reduction in both childhood and adult vaccines, reaching as much as an 89% reduction following announcement of the global pandemic (Kai Hong, et al. 2020)
- Primary care practices saw over 60% reduction in patient visits (Slavitt, A., and F. Mostashari. 2020)
- Practices in value-based payment arrangements were more resilient than those in fee-for-service (Roiland, R., et al, 2020)

Our collaborative has established four focus areas:

- Improve Patient Outcomes
- Reduce Health Care Costs
- Increase Innovation in Primary Care Delivery and Payment
- Primary Care Workforce Transformation & Expansion

We seek to work with you on each of these objectives, but we would emphasize the urgency of two areas of public policy that stand to immediately improve primary care, reduce health disparities and benefit American communities. Those are:

- Innovation in Primary Care Delivery and Payment
- Primary Care Workforce Transformation & Expansion

Mr. Secretary, we are at an inflection point. Over the next decade over 30 million people will age into the Medicare program. Millions more will grow to depend on the Medicaid program and others will seek a more meaningful relationship with their individual or employer-sponsored health plan. More than 30 million more Americans are uninsured or underinsured and most have no access to primary care at all, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations. Each of these populations, regardless of age, geography or health condition, would benefit greatly from a continuous relationship with a primary care physician or team.

The recently published NASEM report *Implementing High Quality Primary Care* includes many recommendations on how to build and support a primary care system. The report correctly states that:

"... high-quality primary care, distinct from most other health care services, is a common good, delivering benefits for society and to individuals. Fundamentally, the committee holds that primary care is essential to the American values of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and merits status as a common good."

Our collaboration is a diverse collection of organizations whose physicians, clinicians, products and clinics reflect the diversity of patients that we serve. We are caring for infants and children, adults and seniors in the Medicaid, Medicare and commercial markets and bring a wealth of experience to the national discourse on how to best fix our health care system. Our organizations would welcome the opportunity to engage with you and your team to identify those areas where we can collaborate on behalf of patients. To this end, we would request a meeting with you in the near future to discuss how we can work collaboratively to improve the health of individuals and communities by building a more robust primary care system.

If you or your staff have any questions about our comments, please contact Stephanie Quinn at squinn@aafp.org

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Primary Care for America (PCfA) is a collaboration focused on demonstrating the value of primary care, the need for increased primary care investment and the importance of innovation in primary care delivery and payment models. PCfA is comprised of a diverse group of key partners in the American health care industry: agilon health, Aledade, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, Catalyst Health Network, ChenMed, Elation Health, Everside Health, MDVIP, National Association of Community Health Centers, One Medical and VillageMD. For more information about Primary Care for America, visit primarycareforamerica.org.