

January 12, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20101

Dear Secretary Becerra:

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) is requesting that HHS extend the COVID-19 public health emergency for an additional 90 days before it expires on January 16, 2022. Hospice and palliative care providers are still being severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically through staff and testing shortages. Extending the public health emergency will provide essential support and flexibilities to hospices and palliative care providers as they continue to serve patients safely and effectively, while facing another record COVID-19 surge.

NHPCO is the nation's largest membership organization for hospice providers and professionals who care for people affected by serious and life-limiting illness. NHPCO members provide care in more than 4,000 hospice and palliative care locations and care for over two-thirds of the Medicare beneficiaries served by hospice.

The hospice and palliative care community can better serve patients due to the flexibilities granted during the public health emergency, initially effective January 27, 2020, and extended multiple times. We greatly appreciate the continued extension of this necessary step. The declaration has provided the hospice and palliative care community with necessary resources and flexibilities through approved Section 1135 waivers, allowing critical services to be provided via telehealth, and flexibility for some Medicare Hospice Conditions of Participation. The waivers have enabled hospice and palliative care providers to respond effectively to the urgent and complex needs of patients and their families and to limit the exposure to COVID-19 by patients, families, and staff. Until the pandemic begins to subside, assistance and flexibility from the Federal government is crucial.

We urge immediate action to extend the public health emergency for 90 days past the January 16, 2022, expiration date. As the omicron variant has increased infection and hospitalization rates, an extension of the public health emergency is essential to allowing hospice and palliative care providers to offer care for patients in the home during this difficult time.

Thank you for your consideration. For additional information or if you have questions, please contact Hannah Yang Moore, Chief Advocacy Officer, NHPCO at hmoore@nhpco.org.

Sincerely,



Edo Banach, JD
President and CEO