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October 21, 2020

Alex M. Azar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20101

RE: Operation Warp Speed Vaccination Prioritization and Hospice

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), I thank you for your continued leadership in keeping Americans safe and supporting health care providers as we face the coronavirus pandemic together. NHPCO is the largest membership organization representing the entire spectrum of hospice and palliative care programs and professionals in the United States. NHPCO is comprised of nearly 4,200 hospice locations with more than 57,000 hospice staff and volunteers, as well as 48 state hospice and palliative care organizations. We appreciate your ongoing collaboration with the hospice and palliative care community in responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

We are grateful to the Administration for providing the hospice and palliative care community resources and flexibilities that have enabled providers to provide high quality care to their patients and families during this time of uncertainty, including the initial distribution of 10 million COVID-19 rapid point-of-care kits by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for hospice and home health programs.

We are aware that Operation Warp Speed (OWS) has made significant progress toward the development of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, with multiple candidates in Phase 3 clinical trials. **We request that HHS make hospice and palliative providers and staff priority recipients of the first FDA approved COVID-19 vaccine.** We are aware that the Centers for Disease Control will work with local communities, governments, and other partners to identify the best places and times to reach at risk populations and utilize strategic distribution points via community health centers, schools, workplaces, mobile clinics, and pharmacies.<sup>1</sup> Hospice programs are community health care providers and should be among the strategic distribution points for CDC and HHS.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/strategy-for-distributing-covid-19-vaccine.pdf>

On October 16, 2020, [HHS](#) and the Department of Defense ([DoD](#)) announced agreements with CVS and Walgreens to provide and administer COVID-19 vaccines to residents of long-term care facilities (LTCF). To fulfill the Administration's stated goal of protecting especially vulnerable Americans to combat COVID-19, hospice staff and the patients and families they serve must be part of the prioritized groups for initial COVID-19 vaccination efforts until there are enough doses available for every American who wishes to be vaccinated.

Hospice and palliative care professionals provide services in the patient's place of residence, including their homes, nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, and long-term care facilities. Designation of COVID-19 vaccines to hospice and palliative care staff and their families would quickly help prevent further spread of life-threatening COVID-19 outbreaks throughout different healthcare settings and surrounding communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff on all of the various Operation Warp Speed initiatives including testing and therapeutics, and we look forward to offering our assistance with the ongoing vaccination efforts. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or have a member of your team contact Hannah Yang Moore, Chief Advocacy Officer, at [hmoore@nhpco.org](mailto:hmoore@nhpco.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edo Banach', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edo Banach  
President & CEO