

January 15, 2021

## President-elect Biden Announces \$1.9 Trillion COVID-19 Relief Plan with Provisions Affecting Hospitals and Health Systems

*Funding for vaccines, testing, and supplies, among other provisions included in package*

President-elect Biden last night [unveiled plans](#) for a roughly \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, which includes a number of provisions that affect hospitals and health systems. Biden hopes that Congress will consider the legislation soon after he is inaugurated next week. It is unclear at this time if it will gain bipartisan support.

Provisions to bolster the nation's COVID-19 health care response include additional resources for vaccines, treatment, personal protective equipment, testing, contact tracing and workforce development. Other health care-related provisions would expand subsidies for certain forms of health care coverage and create new occupational safety standards that would apply to a wide range of workers.

Other non-health care specific provisions would provide financial support for families and small businesses, as well as extend and expand support for housing, child care, food and the education system. In addition, the plan would require that a broader range of employers, including health care employers, provide COVID-19-related paid leave for all employees. The package also includes some infrastructure and cybersecurity provisions.

The proposal identifies as a priority addressing inequities in the impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and lower-income communities and includes a number of provisions targeted at improving equity in the COVID-19 response and health outcomes.

**AHA Take:** In a statement, AHA President and CEO Rick Pollack said, "America's hospitals and health systems, and our heroic front-line caregivers, applaud President-elect Biden's focus and broad approach in bringing the COVID-19 pandemic to an end. We both share this as among the highest priorities for the nation. We continue to call for increased federal leadership, support and resources to combat this virus that has devastated countless families and communities and this plan makes important strides in these directions." **View AHA's [full statement](#) that was shared with the media last night.**

A summary of provisions important to hospitals and health systems follows.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PROVISIONS IMPORTANT TO HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SYSTEMS

**COVID Health System Response.** The plan would advance a number of proposals aimed at increasing public health and health care system capacity for vaccine deployment, testing, and treatment, among other efforts. These include:

- **National Vaccine Program.** The proposal would provide \$20 billion to launch a national vaccination program that would include community vaccination centers and mobile vaccination units. The plan clarifies that the vaccine will be available to all, regardless of immigration status, and will provide for coverage of the administration fee to ensure that cost will not deter a person from getting vaccinated.
- **Testing Capacity.** The plan includes \$50 billion to expand testing capabilities with a particular focus on supporting school reopening, as well as combatting the virus in certain vulnerable settings, such as prisons and long-term care facilities.
- **Public Health Workforce.** The proposal would fund 100,000 public health workers to support vaccination outreach and contact tracing efforts with the intention of maintaining these roles after the conclusion of the COVID-19 public health emergency to help bolster long-term public health capacity.
- **Underserved Populations and Health Disparities.** The plan would provide specific funding to expand access to COVID-19 treatment, care and vaccinations for underserved populations through new investments in community health centers and health services on tribal lands.
- **Resources and Support for Congregate Settings.** The proposal would provide states with funding for “strike teams” to help long-term care facilities experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and resources for federal, state, and local prisons, jails, and detention centers to deploy mitigation strategies, including deployment of vaccines and physical modifications to allow for social distancing.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Other Supplies.** The proposal would increase the Disaster Relief Fund by \$30 billion for the purchase of PPE and other supplies, such as laboratory reagents, as well as invest an additional \$10 billion in domestic manufacturing of such supplies. In addition, it would fully fund with federal dollars emergency response services provided by the National Guard.
- **COVID-19 Treatment.** The plan calls for an unspecified increase in the federal investment in the development, manufacturing and purchasing of COVID-19 treatments, as well as studies of the long-term impacts of the disease.
- **Occupational Safety COVID-19 Protection Standard.** The provision would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to, among other things, issue a COVID-19 Protection Standard addressing workplace safety, including protections against retaliation of workers who identify potential

violations of the standard. The standard would apply to a broader set of workers than are typically covered by OSHA.

- **COVID-19 Surveillance.** The plan would build the national capacity to track virus outbreaks and mutations.

**Health Care Coverage.** The proposal would attempt to address some gaps in coverage by providing an unspecified level of COBRA subsidy through September 2021, as well as increasing the value of and eligibility for subsidies for coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplaces. It is unclear if the changes to the Marketplace subsidies would be permanent.

**Extension and Expansion of COVID-related Paid Leave.** The proposal would extend through September 2021 the COVID-19-related paid leave made available through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. It also would increase the amount of leave to 14 weeks and apply this requirement to more employers, including those with more than 500 employees. Tax credits to finance this leave would be available to employers with less than 500 employees and to state and local governments.

**Funding for State, Local, Territorial and Tribal Governments.** The plan includes \$350 billion in emergency funding for state, local, and territorial governments for a number of uses, including supporting front line public workers, distributing the vaccine, expanding testing, reopening schools, and maintaining other vital services. It also would commit \$20 billion to support Tribal governments' response to the pandemic.

**Additional Health Care Investments.** The proposal would provide additional federal resources for behavioral health (\$4 billion), veterans' health (\$20 billion) and programs aimed at reducing gender-based violence (\$800 million).

**Support for Small Businesses.** The proposal would provide additional resources to small business, including \$15 billion in grants to the hardest hit small businesses and a \$35 billion investment in state, local, tribal, and non-profit small business financing programs. It is unclear whether the plan includes any additional resources to the Paycheck Protection Program.

**Child Care.** The proposal includes several provisions to support child care providers and improve access to child care, including by providing an additional \$15 billion to the Child Care and Development Block Grant program, as well as increasing eligibility and the value of the child care tax credit.

**Hazard Pay.** The plan will "call on" business leaders to provide front-line workers, including caregivers, with hazard pay. There are insufficient details on the proposal to know whether this would be a voluntary effort or a requirement and which types of companies would be included.

**Cybersecurity.** In light of the recent SolarWinds breach, the most prolific and serious cyberattack in history impacting government and private sector alike, the Biden administration has prioritized bolstering U.S. cyber defenses. The administration will be seeking approximately \$2 billion to modernize federal information technology to protect against future cyberattacks. This will include requests for funding to surge hiring of cybersecurity experts and for increased funding of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA). The bolstering of federal cybersecurity defenses and expansion of the monitoring and incident response capabilities of CISA will assist in defending U.S. critical infrastructure sectors, including health care.

### **FURTHER QUESTIONS**

If you have questions, please contact AHA at 800-424-4301.