



NACo UPDATE: FEDERAL COVID-19 RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS FOR COUNTIES

Based on the unprecedented nature of this pandemic, NACo is asking county officials to help identify and share ideas to improve federal laws, regulations and program guidance to assist your local efforts.

COUNTY PERSPECTIVE

Counties are responding to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and are on the front lines of our nation's local public health emergency response and overall public safety efforts. Now, more than ever, we need strong federal, state and local intergovernmental collaboration to address this crisis.

Counties nationwide are committed to working with both Congress and the Administration to advance legislation that assists with the mitigation of this public health crisis and its potential far reaching economic, health and safety impacts on our nation. We respectfully urge that a portion of the federal resources directed at the pandemic flow directly to counties, based on our statutory responsibilities.

Nationally, counties invest \$83 billion annually in community health systems and support 903 hospitals, 824 long-term care facilities and over 1,900 public health departments—local agencies that are essential components of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 containment strategy. In more than 26 states, counties also help finance and administer the Medicaid program, the largest source of health insurance coverage in the U.S., covering nearly one-quarter of the population.

As the ground troops in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, counties are rapidly disseminating factual and timely updates to the public, while pursuing containment and mitigation strategies. This includes building cross jurisdictional partnerships that span political levels and boundaries to implement best practices to prepare for and mitigate community transmission of COVID-19 in places where our most vulnerable residents reside such as hospitals, nursing homes, homeless shelters and jails. We are also working with groups across the country to ensure that children have access to meals they need throughout school closures and that older Americans and those with special needs can similarly access food delivery, health care and other essential life services.

While responding to this global pandemic, counties are also responsible for many other critical national functions that may be impacted by the coronavirus. Counties are key players in managing our national election system over the next few months, providing oversight for the 2020 census, helping our local small businesses navigate during this time—all while trying to stabilize our own workforce and budgets.

FEDERAL ACTION

Congress has cleared an \$8.3 billion emergency supplemental appropriations package

Congress and the Administration are in the process of responding to the coronavirus outbreak with economic stimulus measures, public health investments and aid to state and local governments. On March 6, President Trump signed an \$8.3 billion emergency supplemental appropriations package ([P.L. 116-123](#)) that includes comprehensive resources to enhance the national response to coronavirus, as well as key provisions to support state and local efforts to address cases of the illness.

As passed, the legislation specifically includes:

- \$2.2 billion in public health funding to support prevention, preparedness and response efforts, including a \$1 billion set-aside for State and Local Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) grants to support states, counties, cities and tribes, half of which will be distributed within 30 days. Under this provision, each state will receive at least \$4 million in PHEP grants. *For county administered public health authorities, we strongly encourage county officials to work closely with state public health offices on the timing and requirements for suballocation and use of these funds.*
- \$3 billion in funding for research and development of coronavirus vaccines and diagnostic tools, and \$100 million in supplemental appropriations for Community Health Centers (CHC).
- \$3.1 billion in funding will support the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

Congress is currently considering an additional supplemental relief package

As the economic effects of COVID-19 ripple through America's counties, Congress is considering a second package of relief for Americans. These negotiations are fluid, and the details of the next package remain in flux. The House is expected to pass a negotiated bill on Friday afternoon (March 13). This bill may include provisions from H.R. 6201 like free coronavirus testing for every American, an increase in the federal government's Medicaid spending, increased unemployment insurance and food assistance, and paid sick leave and up to three months of paid family and medical leave. The Senate cancelled its recess for next week and is likely to consider the House-passed bill or its own version, before paving the way for the president's consideration.

The Family First Coronavirus Response Act ([H.R. 6201](#)):

- Requires all COVID-19 diagnostic testing to be covered by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and provide states the option to expand Medicaid eligibility to uninsured populations for purposes of COVID-19 testing

- Provides temporary increase to states' federal Medicaid assistance for the public health emergency for COVID-19
- \$500 million to supplement the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Child (WIC), which would provide access to nutrition foods to low-income pregnant women or mothers with young children who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 emergency
- \$400 million to supplement the Emergency Food Assistance Program to assist local food banks to meet increased demand for low-income Americans during the outbreak
- \$250 million to supplement the Senior Nutrition Program to provide 25 million additional home-delivered and pre-packaged meals to low-income seniors who depend on the program
- Allows the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve state plans to provide emergency SNAP assistance to households with children who receive free school meals, but whose schools closed due to COVID-19 outbreak
- \$5 million to supplement paid sick leave to individuals affected by COVID-19. Specifically, the bill would allocate additional funding to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and instruct the agency to administer the emergency paid sick days program
- \$1 billion in funding for emergency grants to states for activities related to processing and paying unemployment insurance benefits to individuals affected by COVID-19

President declares national state of emergency to speed COVID-19 response

On March 13, President Trump declared a National Emergency by invoking the Stafford Act, which allows for more federal aid for local governments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist with the response. In total, the declaration would free up \$50 billion to address COVID-19 as well as:

- Unlock resources from FEMA's disaster relief fund
- Allow the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to waive certain regulations to more quickly deliver testing and care for coronavirus patients
- Waive interest that accrues on all federal student loans "until further notice"

Other standalone bills have been introduced in both chambers of Congress

Separately, there have also been bills introduced in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate to address other aspects of COVID-19. Some of these include:

- Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6183) that would amend the Help America Vote Act of 2002. The bill would require states and localities to meet standards for the location and operation

of polling places used in election for federal offices, including a standard requiring states to ensure that no individual waits for longer than one hour to cast a vote at a polling place

- Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) introduced a bill (H.R. 5997) that would direct the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to coordinate the efforts of federal departments and agencies with respect to COVID-19
- Rep. Dian DeGette (D-Colo.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6173) that require group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group or individual health insurance coverage to cover COVID-19 testing without cost sharing
- Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) introduced a bill (S. 3442) that would require health insurers to cover costs related to COVID-19. The bill would also provide for special enrollment periods for individuals diagnosed with COVID-19
- Rep. Stephanie Murphy (D-Fla.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6198) that would provide emergency paid leave benefits to certain individuals affected by COVID-19
- Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-Fla.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6213) that would provide coverage of testing for COVID-19 under group health plans, and individual and group health insurance coverage
- Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6187) that would direct the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve state waiver requests for meal distribution even if they result in increased costs to the federal government. The bill would amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act
- Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-Wash.) introduced a bill (H.R. 6019) that would expand the tropical disease priority review voucher program to include COVID-19 and would provide manufacturers with incentives for development of a vaccine
- Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) introduced a bill (S. 3302) that would work to advance the Global Health Security (GHS) agenda, fund GHS programs through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and create an interagency review process for information sharing

NACo will continue to monitor federal policy movement and provide updates. Please visit www.naco.org/coronavirus for additional resources.