



Dear Colleagues,

This week, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, my gratitude and admiration goes out to those on the frontlines who are serving their country: heroic healthcare workers and everyone who keeps our hospitals running, but also every member of the HHS family and every state, local, and private-sector partner who is working to alleviate hardship in different ways. For months now, the human services components of HHS have been responding to this crisis and meeting vulnerable Americans' unique needs.

This work began back in January, when we started flying home American citizens from Wuhan, China, while the outbreak was raging there. The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response worked with CDC, ASPR, and the State Department to bring hundreds of Americans home from Wuhan. Then, working with the Commissioned Corps and members of the National Disaster Medical System, ACF caseworkers ensured that these Americans were well taken care of upon being quarantined.

The number of Americans repatriated eventually totaled more than 3,000—many from cruise ships, including one couple who spent a rather extended honeymoon, having their needs met by HHS team members, at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Once quarantine ended, ACF's emergency team made any necessary referrals to state services for people who needed special assistance on returning to their home state because of their unexpected situation.

Tragically, so many Americans here at home have now seen their lives disrupted as well. Millions of Americans have lost their jobs due to the economic crisis, and many older Americans and people with disabilities are having a harder time accessing what they need for daily life. HHS and our partners in communities across the country have been there to help.

A couple weeks ago, we sent a new \$250 million round of grant funding from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to community organizations that support older Americans, known as aging networks. Those funds allowed for the continuation, and even expansion, of meal delivery services that many older Americans need to live independently. We've already seen that money put to use. Some states are ensuring not only that the meals are getting to seniors, but that the meals are coming from local restaurants whose businesses are struggling. Other help is important too: Florida's aging network, which is supported by ACL, is combating social isolation by providing tablets to nursing home residents to help them communicate with loved ones.

We're also working to protect persons with disabilities and older Americans in accessing healthcare. Our Office for Civil Rights has been taking action to ensure that states and healthcare providers do not discriminate on the basis of disability or age in the allocation of medical care,

and ACL has been helping Americans with disabilities understand their rights in healthcare settings.

Another vulnerable group of Americans impacted by the virus is youth in or aging out of foster care, as well as children who've been identified as at risk for abuse or neglect. Because social distancing can make in-person visits by child welfare workers difficult, the Children's Bureau at the Administration for Children and Families has been working to inform states that they can use child welfare funds to purchase and support technology for virtual case management, as well as to purchase personal protective equipment for caseworkers doing in-person visits.

We've also been in touch with states about youth who aged out of foster care and are now attending college. With the COVID-19 outbreak causing most colleges to close temporarily, some of the youth once in the care of our state partners have effectively become homeless because many of them don't have families to go home to. Last month, ACF sent a letter to all state child welfare directors urging them to contact the children who had aged out of their system and are currently in college. When we followed up with the states, we found out that many of them were able to use ACF's letter to work with colleges and make arrangements allowing students to continue to live on campus or in other locations, rather than facing homelessness.

Finally, ACF has pushed out \$3.5 billion in new funding for the Office of Child Care's block grant program, which includes significant new flexibilities for states to focus these funds on those who may need help with childcare most at this time: essential workers and first responders. Our Office of Head Start is working to help states and Head Start providers figure out how to use their locations as a resource for emergency child care, supporting first responders and essential personnel as they protect our nation's health.

One of HHS's five strategic goals is to strengthen the economic and social well-being of Americans across the lifespan, including through human services. As you can tell, that kind of work doesn't stop during a pandemic—in fact, it just gets more important.

The heroic response our country is mounting to this pandemic is only possible because all of America is united in supporting those on the frontlines and those whose lives have been disrupted.

Please know that the work you are doing every day is making a real difference and plays an indispensable role in this all-of-America effort.

Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services