

The Immunocompromised Collaborative

November 27, 2023

Governor Sarah Sanders
State Capitol
500 Woodlane Street
Little Rock, AR 72201
Email: sarah.sanders@governor.arkansas.gov

Commissioner Alan McClain
One Commerce Way
Little Rock, AR 72202
Email: alan.mcclain@arkansas.gov

RE: Ensure Access to COVID-19 Treatments in Arkansas to Prevent Serious Illness & Hospitalizations

Dear Governor Sanders and Commissioner McClain:

We, the undersigned organizations, advocate on behalf of a broad and diverse range of patient populations living with chronic disease and hard-to-treat conditions and the communities that serve and support them in Arkansas and across the country. Amid the convergence of flu season and a rise in COVID-19 cases here in Arkansas and nationwide, it is critical that patients have immediate access to treatments to mitigate the impacts of these infectious diseases. **As such, we request that you implement policies to ensure Arkansas patients' cost-sharing on COVID-19 antiviral treatments is affordable to enable access to these treatments, which have proven to be critical in preventing serious complications and hospitalization.**

In [guidance](#) from November 2022, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) encouraged Medicare plan sponsors to place at least one COVID-19 antiviral treatment "on a preferred or \$0 cost-sharing tier, if available in the plan benefit structure"¹ to maximize access to these lifesaving drugs for seniors in the ongoing fight against COVID-19. Calling these treatments "crucial for preventing severe illness from the virus,"² the CMS guidance notes that plan sponsors should ensure that patients can access lifesaving COVID-19 antiviral therapies by eliminating hurdles within insurance benefit design.

In recent months, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has reported a [rise](#) in COVID-19 case prevalence and hospitalizations. Moreover, concerns have been raised around the simultaneous rising cases of COVID-19, flu, and RSV. This impending public health challenge requires urgent preparation by federal and state officials to ensure that Americans can avoid severe symptoms and the long-lasting impacts of COVID-19. This is of particular concern for those who are immunocompromised.

Antiviral therapies have demonstrated efficacy in lowering the risk of long COVID, more severe symptoms, hospitalization, and even death. Research on a specific COVID-19 variant shows that people who had received one COVID-19 antiviral had a [44%](#) reduced risk of hospitalization or death compared to those who did not receive treatment. For individuals who took the antiviral treatment and had not been vaccinated, the risk of hospitalization or death was [81%](#) lower. Since U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approval, these treatments have significantly lessened rates of severe COVID-19, kept Americans out of the hospital, and prevented many deaths. Removing access barriers to COVID-19 therapeutics can support efforts to mitigate the ongoing disparate impacts of COVID-19 on rural and other historically underserved groups.

Timing is critical for the treatment of COVID-19, as antiviral therapies must be administered within five days of symptom onset. Patients do not have time to wait to determine if they can afford a treatment that can keep them out of the hospital and mitigate severe symptoms while managing daily costs and responsibilities. Following the lead of CMS guidance, low or \$0 copays for these antiviral treatments would remove the financial burden and enable patients with COVID-19 to act quickly to avoid more severe symptoms, hospitalization, and death.

We urge Arkansas officials to take action to remove affordability barriers to effective COVID-19 antiviral treatments and to call on private health plan sponsors to maintain low or \$0 copays for these vital treatments, ensuring the safety of the most vulnerable community members in Arkansas.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Lynn Albizo of the Immune Deficiency Foundation at lalbizo@primaryimmune.org. Thank you for your commitment to supporting the health and well-being of the citizens of Arkansas.

Sincerely,

AiArthritis
The AIDS Institute
Alliance for Aging Research
ALS Association
American Kidney Fund
Autoimmune Association
Cancer Support Community
CancerCare
Community Liver Alliance
CLL Society
Disability Policy Consortium
HealthyWomen
HIV Medicine Association
ICAN, International Cancer Advocacy Network
Immune Deficiency Foundation
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lupus Foundation of America
Lymphoma Research Foundation
RetireSafe
Solve M.E.
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network