April 29, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Protecting People with Diabetes During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

The National Diabetes Volunteer Leadership Council (NDVLC) and the undersigned national diabetes advocacy partners urge you to take additional steps to protect people with diabetes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The unique health challenges of managing diabetes have been exacerbated by the recent economic fallout, placing millions of Americans with diabetes at increased risk of dying from COVID-19.

We ask that you consider steps in three areas:

1. Access to affordable health insurance
2. Access to affordable medications
3. Research into the impact of COVID-19 on people with diabetes

Access to Affordable Health Insurance:
It is essential that a person living with diabetes has access to affordable care through affordable health insurance to avoid devastating complications such as heart attack, stroke, blindness, amputation or kidney disease, that occur all too often with uncontrolled diabetes. Approximately 1 in 8 adults in the US is living with diabetes. With over 22 million Americans currently unemployed, there are approximately 2.75 million people with diabetes facing uncertainty whether they will be able to access lifesaving and life sustaining medicines and supplies like insulin, continuous glucose monitor sensors, insulin pump supplies and more. These essential tools enable a person with diabetes to manage their blood sugar and minimize unwanted emergency room visits. The individual and small business exchanges should be reopened in all 50 states so unemployed Americans can find affordable insurance. Congress also must recognize the disproportionate burden young adults will bear during the economic downturn. We urge you to raise the age for children on parents’ insurance plans from age 26 to age 32.

Access to Affordable Medications:
Even people with insurance face challenges accessing their medications during this time of social distancing, due to insurance plan designs. We urge you to require all federally regulated insurance plans to take the following immediate action:

- Eliminate consumer out-of-pocket cost for insulin
- Offer 90-day refills to minimize trips to the pharmacy and improve the ability of patients to quarantine when necessary. This should include access to all necessary diabetes supplies
and tools such as continuous glucose monitor sensors, insulin pump supplies, and diabetes testing supplies

- Eliminate step therapy on diabetes medications. Step therapy results in additional health care provider and lab visits counter to social distancing requirements, increasing prescriber burden at a time when our health care system is already strained.
- Require health plans to include continuity of care periods following formulary changes so patients can continue using prescribed medications that are proven successful for them. Grandfathering helps patients avoid additional office and lab visits that are not medically indicated and are counter to social distancing requirements.

**Research into the impact of COVID-19 on people with diabetes:**
Glytec Research released an observational study on April 17, 2020, on the impact of diabetes and uncontrolled hyperglycemia in hospitalized patients with COVID-19. This study found that patients with poorly controlled diabetes had an in-hospital mortality rate of 29% which is more than four times higher than patients without diabetes. In addition, they found that 42% of patients who had no evidence of diabetes prior to arriving at the hospital but developed hyperglycemia while in the hospital died during their stay. As noted in a recent letter to you from the Endocrine Society, there is a significant gap in knowledge and research on how COVID-19 impacts patients with diabetes. We urge you to provide additional funding to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases to undertake research on COVID-related comorbidities to help prepare for disease mitigation and the development of treatments and vaccines. It is particularly important that research and data provided to and available from federal agencies address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minority communities in the US.

Thank you for your efforts to protect the country from this pandemic and the sweeping economic impact. We appreciate your consideration of these requests to further protect a highly vulnerable population of Americans. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you and your staff. Please contact Erika Emerson, NDVLC Executive Director, at ebemerson@ndvlc.org or (303) 506-6106 if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

National Diabetes Volunteer Leadership Council
American Diabetes Association
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists
Children with Diabetes
College Diabetes Network
Diabetes Patient Advocacy Coalition
DiabetesSisters
The diaTribe Foundation
T1D Exchange

Cc: Senator Susan Collins
    Senator Jeanne Shaheen
    Representative Diana DeGette
    Representative Tom Reed