

Gov. Baker announces actions to expand health care workforce, support for providers during COVID-19

Governor Baker announced new actions that will support efforts to expand the Commonwealth's health care workforce by expediting licensing for certain health care workers and onboarding for health care volunteers who have signed up through the Administration's new online volunteer portal. The Administration also outlined a Department of Public Health order that will support continuing steps being taken to expand care capacity for older adults infected with COVID-19, in addition to other actions designed to support providers and businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Expedited Onboarding Of Health Care Volunteers: Last week, the Administration launched an initiative to recruit volunteer medical professionals to support hospitals as the Commonwealth continues to expand medical capacity. Since launching the initiative, more than 1,800 volunteers have already signed up, reflective of the Commonwealth's world-class health care workforce. To support expedited onboarding of these volunteers, the Department of Public Health has issued an order authorizing the Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management to perform a CORI check on any volunteer who registered through the volunteer portal without a notarized CORI acknowledgment form. The Order requires any entity performing a CORI check pursuant to the Order to implement sufficient compensating controls to reasonably verify an individual's identity, including inspection of a photographic form of government-issued identification via teleconference.

On-Demand Licensing For Health Professionals: To further

support the Commonwealth's health care workforce, the Department of Public Health has issued an order designed to provide on-demand licensing and re-licensing for certain health care professionals. The Order expedites licensing for professionals with licenses in good standing in other states, and professionals who have allowed their Massachusetts licenses to expire within the past 10 years while in good standing. This order applies to a wide range of health professionals: registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, advanced practice registered nurse, dentist, dental hygienist, dental assistant, pharmacist, pharmacy technician, nursing home administrator, physician assistant, respiratory therapist, perfusionist, genetic counselor, community health worker and emergency medical technician.

Expanding Care Capacity: As part of its efforts to expand existing health care capacity, the Administration's COVID-19 Response Command Center is working with long-term care facilities to establish dedicated skilled nursing facilities to care for individuals infected with COVID-19. The initiative offers an alternative location where individuals who are stable but still need medical care can be transferred to recover, relieving pressure on hospitals and opening up hospital beds for the treatment of patients with the greatest medical need. The transfer of existing residents out of participating facilities will be handled with the utmost care. The Administration has received federal approval from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for this initiative.

The Department of Public Health has issued an order waiving certain MassHealth regulations regarding the transfers and discharge of long-term care facility residents, for the limited purpose of safely transferring and discharging all residents living in a long-term care facility that is intended to be used as a designated COVID-19 facility. The Command Center has worked with the Beaumont Rehabilitation and Skilled

Nursing Center in Worcester to start this effort, which will help bring 300 skilled nursing facility beds online in central Massachusetts. The Command Center will continue to work with long-term care facilities to add care capacity for older adults.

Financial Relief For Care Providers: Governor Baker today issued an order providing the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administrative flexibility to extend financial relief to providers of critical health care and social services that serve EOHHS clients, including members of MassHealth. The financial relief may be in the form of temporary rate adjustments, supplemental payments, and new rate and payment methodologies that reflect the modified ways services are being delivered. These measures will be subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance. This will allow EOHHS to extend critical financial support to:

Providers that are facing extraordinary demand due to the COVID-19 emergency, while, at the same time, have lost significant revenue because they have had to cancel other procedures and appointments;

Providers that are necessary to keep vulnerable individuals safe in their homes or residences and out of more acute settings like hospitals; and

Human service providers that have been forced to respond to the unanticipated circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic by altering the way they deliver services and the hours and scope of these services.

Shareholder Meeting Requirements: Under Massachusetts law, public companies can permit shareholders and their proxies to participate in annual or special shareholder meetings by remote communication, but they are also required to hold a meeting in a physical space that shareholders can attend in

person. Given the challenges of meeting such requirements while non-essential workers are required to stay home and gatherings are limited to 10 people, Governor Baker today issued an order adjusting this meeting requirement. The Governor's order permits public companies to hold annual or special shareholder meetings completely by means of remote communication, until 60 days after the end of the state of emergency. Additionally, if a public company has already sent written notice to its shareholders of an annual or special meeting to be held in a physical location, this order allows that company to notify its shareholders that the meeting now will be held solely through remote communication without mailing another notice, provided they issue a press release, send email notice where possible, and take other reasonable steps to notify their shareholders of the change.