



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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September 20, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 120F  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

*Re: Request for Federal Medical Staff Resources to State of Washington*

Dear Secretary Becerra:

Thank you to President Biden and yourself for your leadership and support as the country continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, the current COVID-19 surge has created exceptional demands on health care systems nationwide, and Washington state is no exception. The unprecedented increase in hospital admissions and occupancy rates has created extreme stress on hospitals, long term care facilities, and health care workers. The rise in COVID-19 admissions, coupled with severe staffing shortages, is pushing our system to the brink.

This is despite our concerted efforts in Washington state to curb the spread of the disease through an extensive campaign to vaccinate our residents. As of today, more than 75 percent of Washington residents 12 years and older have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and close to 70 percent are fully vaccinated. Further, we have implemented preventive public health measures statewide that include vaccine requirements for state employees, health care and education workers, as well as statewide masking requirements indoors and at large outdoor gatherings, and necessary layered prevention and response measures in schools.

Under Governor Inslee's leadership, we are doing everything in our power to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our state. Fortunately, our hospitals in Washington have made a commitment to leverage all the acute care hospital capacity in the state so that no one hospital alone must be faced with implementing crisis standards of care.

Despite these efforts, we are very concerned this will simply not be enough to alleviate the stress on health care capacity and ensure health care is available for those who need it most in our state. Staff shortages in our healthcare system continue to make this a dire situation. As Governor Inslee recently expressed in the enclosed correspondence to White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients, we need your help.

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President Biden indicated recently that more federal clinical teams would become available, and we would like to utilize that assistance in Washington state. I join Governor Inslee in requesting assistance from the federal government—including Department of Defense resources—to provide our state with necessary medical staff and any other resources that can be used to help our hospitals and long-term care facilities throughout our state.

This request would augment efforts we are already making in Washington state to procure much needed staff. As an example, we have requested 1,200 clinical and non-clinical staff through the General Services Administration (GSA) contracting process offered through FEMA. We are also actively recruiting retirees, volunteers, and students to join our health care provider pool.

I am concerned that the current stress on the health care system will last for the foreseeable future and could worsen before it gets better. We look forward to engaging with you further on receiving medical staff assistance from the federal government that will help mitigate the worrisome surge we are continuing to see across our state.

Please feel free to contact my Deputy Secretary for Policy and Planning, Kristin Peterson, at [kristin.peterson@doh.wa.gov](mailto:kristin.peterson@doh.wa.gov), or the Director of Federal and Interstate Affairs for Governor Inslee, Morgan Wilson, at [morgan.wilson@gov.wa.gov](mailto:morgan.wilson@gov.wa.gov), for any additional questions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH  
Secretary of Health

Enclosure

cc: Dr. Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary of Health, U.S. Health and Human Services  
Renée Bouvion, Regional Health Administrator, Region 10, U.S. Health and Human Services  
Morgan Wilson, Director of Federal and Interstate Affairs, Office of Governor Jay Inslee  
Molly Voris, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Jay Inslee  
Lacy Fehrenbach, Deputy Secretary for COVID-19 Response, Department of Health  
Andy Rose, COVID-19 Incident Commander, Department of Health  
Kristin Peterson, Deputy Secretary for Policy and Planning, Department of Health  
Jessica Todorovich, Chief of Staff, Department of Health  
Nathan Weed, Acting Deputy Secretary for Emergency Preparedness, Department of Health  
Elizabeth Perez, Deputy Secretary for Public Affairs and Equity, Department of Health  
Michael Ellsworth, Federal Liaison and Policy Counsel, Department of Health