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ACOF Statement on Personal Protective Equipment

ACOF is the professional organization representing more than 18,000 practicing osteopathic family physicians, residents and students throughout the United States who rely on personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect their patients, patients' families and caregivers—as well as themselves and their care teams—as they provide care during the COVID-19 outbreak.

ACOF members are on the frontlines of this outbreak by providing critical primary care services across the country. Although our members are leveraging telemedicine and other technologies to protect patients and their families, they still provide many face-to-face services, including screening and treating patients diagnosed with COVID-19 and providing osteopathic manipulative treatment, which involves prolonged close contact with patients. Osteopathic family physicians require PPE in order to engage in these activities in a safe manner during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Ensuring frontline primary care providers, such as family physicians, remain healthy is critical to stopping the COVID-19 outbreak. Without adequate PPE, physicians and their care teams risk exposure to this highly contagious and deadly disease. If these core members of our country's health care workforce become sick and are unable to care for the general public, our health care system would be at risk of collapsing.

We applaud recent actions to address PPE shortages, including the enactment of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which will inject hundreds of billions of dollars into the health care system to help—among other things—providers to access necessary PPE. Additionally, the Administration has used existing authority to increase the availability of health care supplies through the issuance of Executive Orders, including one that prohibits the hoarding of medical supplies, and directing the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to list medical supplies that are in or may become in shortage. We are very encouraged by this activity; however, more must be done to support family physicians and their care teams.

Family physicians do not have the resources that hospital or other major providers have to acquire scarce medical supplies such as PPE. Furthermore, many depictions in the media give the perception that all physicians have access to PPE, including gowns, gloves and N-95

masks. This is not true for family physicians, many who work in outpatient clinics to keep millions of patients out of the hospital.

Many of our family physicians are independently-owned small or solo practices, often operating in rural and underserved areas. The federal government must not forget about these physicians on the frontline of the COVID-19 outbreak as they are currently using every resource available to protect their staff and patients. We therefore urge Congress and the Administration to use all authorities and resources to direct health care materials in short supply, including PPE, to family physicians and their care teams as quickly as possible.

We understand the COVID-19 outbreak is an unprecedented pandemic challenging every facet of our society. We appreciate the federal leadership and actions taken to address this crisis and urge that family physicians are included in the priority category as scarce PPE resources are allocated.