



September 17, 2021

Don Harrington, Acting Director
Arizona Department of Health Services
150 N. 18th Avenue, Suite 500
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dr. Richard Carmona
Sr. Health Advisor for Vaccination
150 N. 18th Avenue, Suite 500
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Re: Emergency Assistance for Rural Hospitals and Emergency Centers

Dear Acting Director Harrington and Dr. Carmona:

As you know from Arizona's statewide COVID-19 dashboard data and your medical expertise, our rural hospitals, emergency rooms and other centers for medical care are nearing collapse due to serious COVID-19 infections coupled with the need for ongoing hospital care. The overcrowding of larger regional hospitals and emergency centers has resulted in an increasing inability for providers to ensure a timely transfer of critically ill patients from rural areas to the required higher level of care. The intensive care unit bed capacity in regional Pima County hospitals has been below five percent for over 40 days.

Urgent, critical care transfers from the Santa Cruz Valley Regional Hospital have not been possible. The same exists for the Copper Queen Community Hospital in Bisbee. The Douglas, Arizona Clinic and the emergency room in Nogales, Arizona, Benson Hospital, and Northern Cochise Community Hospital in Wilcox are overwhelmed. The hospitals and emergency treatment facilities in Yuma County are having the same issues.

As the Arizona Border Counties Coalition, we are requesting that the existing COVID-19 Surge Line be expanded to allow for non-COVID acute care patients. This resource should be provided immediately to ensure proper care to rural patients requiring lifesaving treatments. We ask for your immediate assistance in expanding the surge line through the Arizona Department of Health Services where rural communities, hospitals and emergency rooms can appropriately be connected to critical hospital resources that are essential to provide appropriate care for their patients.

In addition, many of these facilities are near financial collapse due to the ongoing strain of treating both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. This stress on rural medical delivery systems has

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been continuous for the last 18 months, with no relief in sight. Some financial assistance to these rural hospitals, emergency rooms and clinic centers is necessary.

We appreciate Governor Ducey's announcement of \$60 million to support staffing at health care facilities that deploy proven techniques to decrease COVID-19 related hospitalizations, including administering monoclonal antibody treatments and offering vaccination at discharge. As previously noted, many of our hospitals are currently overwhelmed due to lack of staff. We ask for your assistance in establishing a centralized line to assist counties in identifying locations that provide the monoclonal antibody treatments and for your help in recruiting additional facilities and federal healthcare strike teams willing to provide these services in rural and underserved communities.

We would ask for direct funding of for monoclonal antibody treatment teams if a County is able to assemble the professional medical staff to implement these centers and hospitals or other appropriate treatment centers.

Sincerely,



The Honorable Sharon Bronson
Pima County Representative
Arizona Border Counties Coalition



The Honorable Ann English
Cochise County Representative
Arizona Border Counties Coalition



The Honorable Bruce Bracker
Santa Cruz County Representative
Arizona Border Counties Coalition



The Honorable Tony Reyes
Yuma County Representative
Arizona Border Counties Coalition

c: The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor, State of Arizona
Richard Karwaczka, Cochise County Administrator
Jennifer St. John, Santa Cruz County Manager
Susan K. Thorpe, Yuma County Administrator
Chuck Huckelberry, Pima County Administrator