



September 22, 2021

Response to ASHNHA's Sept. 1 Letter Requesting Support

On Sept. 1, 2021, the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) sent a letter to the State of Alaska requesting a disaster declaration related to COVID-19. The ASHNHA letter outlined specific requests that health care facilities and providers requested to meet the challenges it is facing to its infrastructure.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reviewed the letter and requests and is providing a public response and explanation of those requests either being met and answered or outlining why they cannot occur. The specific requests and responses are below:

1. **REQUEST:** Create a batch approval process for immediate licensure of large quantities of emergency staff should the State be successful in securing staffing resources through FEMA or other equivalents.
 - a. **Enacted using emergency licensing and credentialing process.**
Once license is approved, DHSS will waive the background check requirement for the federal contract personnel.
2. **REQUEST:** Reinstate all flexibilities that were in place during the prior disaster declaration. Please see sections 7 and 8 of House Bill 76 concerning Professional and Occupational Licensing, and Telemedicine and Telehealth.
 - a. Section 7 (pertaining to courtesy licenses for certain medical licenses, licensing boards established emergency regulations process to issue courtesy licenses) is **enacted**.
 - b. Section 8 (telehealth) is not in place. The Governor submitted Senate Bill 3006 to achieve these items and it **did not pass the Legislature**.
 - i. Identified as requiring legislative action, could not be done with a disaster declaration.
3. **REQUEST:** Expand current expedited background check process for hospitals and nursing homes beyond just physicians, nurses and certified nursing assistants to include all personnel.
 - a. **Enacted.** This is waived by commissioner of DHSS, using Public Health Emergency Authority granted by Legislature in House Bill 76.
 - b. Title 8 and non-Title 8 workers at ASHNHA facilities are waived from background checks if the facilities submit an attestation/waiver form.

4. **REQUEST:** Suspend certain Medicaid prior authorization requirements to ease workload and burden on health care providers.
 - a. **Enacted.** Medicaid has expedited process that is ongoing.
 - i. Working directly with hospitals to expedite certain transfer requests to approve same day, to include lateral and entity-to-entity transfers.
5. **REQUEST:** Support implementation of emergency certified nursing assistant program.
 - a. **Enacted.**
6. **REQUEST:** Streamline authorization process to ensure ability to approve long-term care (LTC) admissions over weekends and evenings.
 - a. **Enacted.**
 - i. This is part of CMS 1135 blanket waiver that is tied to the federal Public Health Emergency (PHE). This was confirmed in writing to ASHNHA by commissioner that DHSS agreed to "all federal blanket waivers for acute and LTC, including the 3-day hospitalization requirement."
7. **REQUEST:** Follow Medicare process for approving long-term acute care hospital admissions to eliminate delays in existing approval process.
 - a. **Enacted.**
 - i. Medicaid program is working directly with hospitals to expedite long-term acute requests to approve same day transfers.
8. **REQUEST:** Urge health care payors to adopt flexibilities for prior authorization and service approvals as we navigate this crisis.
 - a. **Enacted** through administrative process.
9. **REQUEST:** Implement mitigation measures for a defined period, such as universal masking in indoor settings, as recommended by the CDC.
 - a. Local decisions.
 - b. State buildings that are congregant high-risk settings, such as Corrections, Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Pioneer Homes and Juvenile Justice facilities have had mask requirements since July 2020 in place.
10. **REQUEST:** Urge Alaskans to get vaccinated and recognize the incredible efforts of our caregivers on the frontlines.
 - a. Governor has addressed this multiple times. An interview on Sept. 15 explicitly stated "I strongly urge folks to get a vaccine. I strongly urge them to do that."
 - b. "Give AK a Shot" campaign, a vaccination incentive program with Alaska Chamber.