



November 25, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

**RE: Prioritizing Vaccinations for Dialysis Patients, Their Providers, and Transplant Patients**

Dear Secretary Azar:

Kidney Care Partners requests that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) prioritize vaccine distribution to dialysis patients and their health care providers who provide care to these patients for Phase 1 distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. The National Academies of Sciences (NAS) has recommended that Phase 1 include people of all ages with comorbidities that put them at *significantly* higher risk and high-risk health care workers.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we ask that the federal government specify that dialysis patients and the health care professionals and staff who provide services to dialysis patients be within the first phase of the vaccine distribution plan. We also ask that those patients who have received kidney transplants also receive top priority for vaccination, as soon as the vaccine(s) have been proven safe for that patient population.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, patients with kidney disease, including those who have received a kidney transplant, have been identified by the CDC and other public health experts as having increased risk of severe COVID-19 disease.<sup>2</sup> Most dialysis patients are living with 4 or more comorbidities, including obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.<sup>3</sup> African Americans are disproportionately impacted by kidney disease; they comprise 35 percent of all dialysis patients. African Americans are also disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> During the first several months of the pandemic, CMS data showed that 50 percent of Medicare beneficiaries hospitalized with COVID-19 were patients with chronic kidney disease.<sup>5</sup>

While dialysis facilities, physicians, and other health care providers are working diligently to protect dialysis patients and reduce the spread of the disease, vaccinating these

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<sup>1</sup>National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020. *Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine*. 10. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25917>.

<sup>2</sup>People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html> (accessed: 06/18/2020).

<sup>3</sup>Lee WC, Lee YT, Li LC, et al. [The number of comorbidities predicts renal outcomes in patients with stage 3–5 chronic kidney disease](#). *J Clin Med*. 2018;7:493.

<sup>4</sup>National Academies of Sciences, at 30.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.cms.gov/blog/medicare-covid-19-data-release-blog>

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patients and the health care professionals and staff who provide services to them is the most important next step that needs to be taken. Among the dialysis patient and caregiver populations, individuals who are traveling between nursing homes and dialysis facilities are of utmost importance to prioritize for vaccination. Vaccinating both patients and health professionals will help stop the spread of COVID-19 in the dialysis population and reduce the likelihood they will be hospitalized or infect others.

KCP recognizes that transplant patients have been excluded from COVID-19 vaccine trials thus far and asks HHS to encourage the companies conducting trials to establish safety and efficacy in transplant recipients as expeditiously as possible and to elevate these patients to a Phase 1 priority level as soon as possible thereafter.

Thus, we strongly encourage HHS to expressly state that dialysis patients and the health care providers and workers who care for them, as well as kidney transplant recipients (as soon as the vaccine is proven safe for them), are in Phase 1 of the vaccine distribution plan given the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on this patient population.

KCP appreciates the work the Administration has done to try to combat the virus and support dialysis patients during the pandemic. It is critically important that as vaccines are approved and become available this winter that the Administration takes the next logical step and prioritizes vaccinating dialysis patients and their health care professionals and staff.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to our counsel in Washington, Kathy Lester, if you have any questions. She can be reached at (202) 534-1773 or [klester@lesterhealthlaw.com](mailto:klester@lesterhealthlaw.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Butler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Butler  
Chairman

cc: Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Dr. José Romero, Chair, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices  
Dr. Robert Kadlec, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
Seema Verma, Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services