

August 12, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar:

Thank you for your leadership during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am particularly thankful for your leadership in the Administration to provide support to older Americans, who as you know, are the most vulnerable to this virus. As the Administration continues to respond to this crisis, I encourage you to include senior living providers in a future allocation from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF).

Senior living communities in Montana and throughout the U.S. provide home- and community- based care across independent living, assisted living, memory care, and continuing care retirement communities. While they often care for similar populations as nursing homes, with more than half of all residents over the age of 85 and often suffering comorbidities, these communities that are not primarily supported by Medicaid funds have by and large not received financial relief as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communities are facing increased costs for personal protective equipment, testing, infection control, and labor to meet the demands. Many of these costs skyrocket if a resident or staff member tests positive for the virus. The healthcare heroes in these communities are on the front lines of this crisis, and while they continue to do everything they can to care for our nation's seniors and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, they need financial relief. I appreciate the allocations that the Administration has already made to numerous healthcare providers in Montana and throughout this country, and believe it is critical that we ensure all communities caring for our most vulnerable have access to these much-needed funds.

The need to help all facilities that serve our vulnerable seniors has become clear in Montana, as outbreaks of COVID-19 in senior care have been almost exclusively in assisted living, the very type of facility that has been largely left out of PHSSEF support up to this point. Even the latest funding announcement designed to reach Medicaid providers, including assisted living facilities, left out many of our Montana assisted living facilities. All of these facilities are impacted by this health emergency and need support to keep our vulnerable seniors safe.

The Administration has the authority under the PHSSEF to provide federal support to these communities and the seniors they serve, and I respectfully request your support of including these communities in the next allocation from this fund to help defray some of the increased costs associated with caring for seniors as a result of COVID-19.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Daines". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the beginning.

STEVE DAINES
United States Senator