



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
[sent by email]

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security  
[sent by email]

Subject: Public Health Crisis at United States/Mexico Border

Dear Secretary Azar and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We request your urgent action on behalf of health care providers along the United States/Mexico border. The inadequacy of medical resources in the State of Baja California, including the testing necessary to respond to COVID-19, poses a very real threat to San Diego's ability to manage both its COVID-19 response and its expedient re-opening of the economy. We ask that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in coordination with Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), immediately begin medical checks to protect public health and expedite the free flow of critical goods and essential personnel. We also request priority status to receive more personal protective equipment (PPE) and pharmaceutical supplies in the San Diego region for both standard care and COVID-19 care.

The State of Baja California is reporting a rapidly increasing number of new positive cases per day with a lack of infrastructure, PPE, medication and work force to control the spread of the virus. We ask that CDC and CBP conduct medical checks at the border, temperature checks at the very least, and mandate quarantine for suspected positive individuals. Only the United States government can take action to help control this situation and protect U.S. communities on the Mexican border. We also need the federal government to put pressure on Mexico to enforce social-distancing and shelter-in-place policies as we have done in the United States.

Pre-pandemic, an average of 90,000 people crossed the Tijuana-San Ysidro border daily. When the "non-essential travel" ban went into effect on March 21, border crossings dropped significantly. However, crossings have increased steadily in recent weeks. On April 26, 2020, border crossings exceeded 42,000. Today, coronavirus cases are increasing at rates exceedingly faster among border communities compared to the rest of San Diego County. The *San Diego Union Tribune* reported that cases in San Ysidro grew 111 percent between April 14 and April 20 in comparison to the number of coronavirus cases across the entire county doubling just every 24 days.

Current border travel restrictions do not apply to international trade, U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents and those with work visas. In addition to the need for our border to remain open for the shipment of goods, it is critical that our health care personnel be able to move freely. Additionally, there are hundreds of thousands of American expatriates, many of whom are Medicare beneficiaries or have commercial health care coverage with American health plans and who therefore rely upon medical care in the United States.



There is a misperception that San Diego and Southern California are flattening the curve and therefore supplies and attention can go elsewhere. That is not the case. Hospital COVID-19 cases in the southern part of our region continue to rise. Any impression that we are flattening our curve ignores the threat south of the border and the fact that providers in the San Diego region do not have adequate supplies to meet the projections we anticipate as a result of the increasing cases in our border communities. Many of our supplies are already at critical levels and some supply shipments have been intercepted by FEMA for redistribution. We cannot wait for our supplies to be depleted before we get the assistance we need. This challenge is acute, and will not be without lasting impacts in our region and across our nation if we do not act now. Public health crises do not respect borders.

Collectively, Scripps Health and Sharp HealthCare are serving more than 60% of the region's COVID-19 patients. Recently, Sharp Chula Vista Medical Center and Scripps Mercy Hospital Chula Vista have seen daily increases in COVID patients at rates significantly higher than facilities in other regions of San Diego County. The magnitude of this regional difference is very real. Our Chula Vista hospitals currently care for more COVID-19 positive and patients under investigation than our other acute-care hospitals combined.

We respectfully urge you to act swiftly to help us meet this growing challenge. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can answer any questions or otherwise assist you.

Respectfully,

Chris D. Van Gorder, FACHE  
President and CEO  
Scripps Health  
[VanGorder.Chris@scrippshealth.org](mailto:VanGorder.Chris@scrippshealth.org)  
858.678.7201

Daniel L. Gross  
Executive Consultant  
Sharp HealthCare COVID-19 Strategic Response  
[Dan.Gross@Sharp.com](mailto:Dan.Gross@Sharp.com)  
858.499.4008

CC:

Pete T. Gaynor, Administrator Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)  
Mark A. Morgan, Acting Commissioner U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)  
Robert R. Redfield, MD, Director Centers for Disease Control (CDC)  
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senator  
The Honorable Kamala Harris, United States Senator  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives  
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Republican Leader of the United States House of Representatives  
San Diego Congressional Delegation  
The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor of the State of California  
The Honorable Kevin Faulconer, Mayor of the City of San Diego  
The Honorable Mary Casillas Salas, Mayor of the City of Chula Vista  
The San Diego County Board of Supervisors  
Wilma Wooten, MD, Public Health Officer, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency