June 11, 2021

Hon. Xavier Becerra
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

re: Nursing Home Strike Teams Funding

Dear Secretary Becerra,

AMDA – The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine appreciates Congressional action in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (HR 1319), signed into law on March 11, 2021 by President Biden, to implement nursing home strike teams. The Act specifically includes Sections 9402 and 9818 allocating $250 million each in Medicare and Medicaid funding for “a State to establish and implement a strike team that will be deployed to a skilled nursing facility in the State with diagnosed or suspected cases of COVID–19 among residents or staff for the purposes of assisting with clinical care, infection control, or staffing during the emergency period described in section 1135(g)(i)(B) and the 1-year period immediately following the end of such emergency period.” This dedicated funding gives states and territories within the United States access to invaluable resources in continuing the fight against COVID-19 in nursing homes.

However, despite passage of this legislation on March 11, 2021, these funds have not yet been made available to the states. We urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to take immediate action to make these funds available to states so that facilities can implement strike teams and help our nation’s vulnerable patients and residents in these facilities.

While the conditions in nursing facilities have improved dramatically with the availability of vaccines, the COVID-19 pandemic is by no means behind us. Residents of nursing facilities have remained the most vulnerable population throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We have experienced how a nursing home COVID-19 outbreak can quickly deplete equipment and staff resources, leading temporarily to the need to invoke crisis capacity standards.

Strike teams have emerged as one effective option to provide direct support to nursing homes during outbreaks. These strike teams or rapid response teams have been deployed successfully throughout the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States. While we are encouraged by the steady recent decline in nursing home cases, we remain wary of future COVID-19 threats that include virus
variants, decreasing cohort immunity due to new admissions and new hires, and possibly waning individual immunity. Thus, we encourage all state officials to examine the role of strike teams in the ongoing evidence-based response to COVID-19 in each state’s nursing facilities.

AMDA has put together a comprehensive guide on nursing facility strike teams with specific examples of successful implementation throughout the country. This could serve as an example for setting up or maintaining strike teams with the allocation of these much-needed funds.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please reach out to our Executive Director Mr. Christopher Laxton at claxton@paltc.org or 410-992-3104 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Karl E. Steinberg, MD, HMDC, CMD
President

Christopher E. Laxton, CAE
Executive Director