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Letters to the Editor
The Buffalo News
Buffalo News
P.O. Box 100
Buffalo, New York 14240

41 State Street • Suite 900
Albany, NY 12207
www.nyhpa.org

To the Editor

Contrary to recent reports, there has been no change in health plans' coverage policies related to COVID-19 testing. Since the outset of this ongoing public health emergency, New York's health plans have been and continue to cover testing for the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, as well as waiving any cost sharing for these tests.

While testing is a critical tool to protecting the health of New Yorkers, broad-based testing for individuals who have had no signs or symptoms of the coronavirus – whether it be for students returning to school, for back-to-work, or public health surveillance – is a public health responsibility and generally is not covered by health insurance. Again, this is not a change in coverage policies and consistent with recent federal guidance issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The federal government recognized this public health obligation by providing more than \$160 million to Erie County to help cover the costs of testing as part of the Coronavirus Relief Fund. Given the challenges the pandemic has created, additional federal funding for testing is vital. The lack of further funding will prolong the current public health and economic crises.

Every segment of the health care system has worked extremely hard to combat this unprecedented public health emergency and health plans have been no exception. In addition to covering testing and treatment for COVID-19 with no cost-sharing, health plans have eliminated cost-sharing for telehealth services, provided financial support to hospitals and others in the delivery system, extended premium grace periods to individuals and small business, and donated tens of millions of dollars to nonprofit and human service organizations to support a range of community needs related to coronavirus.

Our industry remains a committed and constructive partner in the ongoing effort to overcome this crisis. However, broad-based testing requires sufficient federal funding so that the state and our health care system have the necessary resources to safeguard the health of all New Yorkers.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Linzer".

Eric Linzer
President & CEO, New York Health Plan Association