



*Leading Through COVID-19*

## HEALTH CARE'S MOMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

At no time in our collective memories has “health” been at the forefront of our national consciousness like it is today. News and social media are consumed with talking about COVID-19. Email inboxes are full of notices about the crisis responses of stores, schools and communities. Families are huddled at home seeking to protect themselves from the virus. The American way of life has been completely disrupted as iconic venues like Times Square and Disney World have become ghost towns. However, amidst the chaos, COVID-19 has been a powerful reminder to everyone that hospitals and health systems serve as the ultimate safety net for saving lives in our communities.

Philanthropy leaders know a great case for charitable support invites others to enable something that is impactful, meaningful and urgent—and never before in our lifetime has the

relevance, value and importance of our health care organizations been so clear.

Yet, many are reticent to ask others to help.

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Many organizations express hesitancy about asking people to make charitable contributions at this time. However, while it is important to be respectful, compassionate and sensitive to the ambiguity and fear within the current situation as well as the certainty of economic impact to us all, it's foolhardy to decide donors don't want to help. Further, rather than buckling under the emotional weight of COVID-19, many donors feel activated to be part of the solutions rather than

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watching from the digital sidelines. Donors also retain the choice to say “no” or “not now.” So, it is inherent upon health philanthropy organizations to illuminate how donors can help by giving to a trusted and ready resource that is positioned and committed to address the complex issues presented by COVID-19: our hospitals.

At this moment, all the work health organizations have done to anticipate the evolving health needs of our communities, to build infrastructure, to craft disaster response plans and to recruit excellent clinical leaders is an incalculable asset to the community served. However, right now, COVID-19 is placing incredible and unanticipated financial pressure on most hospitals. Not only are there significant new needs for things like personal protective gear, equipment and supplies; but many hospitals will also be pushed to create additional bed space or to create ancillary treatment sites to accommodate patient needs during the anticipated surge. Many hospitals are also trying to support caregivers who need temporary places to live to avoid carrying the virus home to their families or childcare to enable them to continue working at all hours while schools and other resources are closed. The American Hospital Association has urged Congress to provide direct financial assistance to hospitals to address these and other critical needs; however, the level of federal assistance needed may not come fast enough—or at all. At the same time, hospitals are experiencing the financial fall-out of necessarily cancelling elective surgeries and other routine care. All this has created a perfect storm for financial vulnerability.

So, if health care’s case for support is not relevant and urgent now...when will it ever be?

#### What to do next:

- 1 Stay focused on communicating the importance and relevance of your mission—even while you are working from home.
- 2 Talk to other health care executives in your organization to understand what the organization will need now and next. Things are moving so fast that there may not be specific items or initiatives. However, understanding the pressure points and areas where capacity will likely be needed still enables you to share a meaningful case with prospective donors.
- 3 Shape a special case for support that is clearly aligned with addressing the current crisis. Seeking charitable investment for ancillary issues at this time could feel a bit tone deaf in the current environment.
- 4 Ask donors to consider an unrestricted gift that will allow the health care organization maximum flexibility in a fluid situation. Otherwise, consider creating an emergency fund that still gives the organization some discretion to direct funds to a range of priorities within this crisis that might not even be clear at this time.

The needs are clear. The urgency is now. So, it’s time to invite people to rally behind the hospitals, physicians, nurses and others who are bravely and boldly on the frontlines of this pandemic. If not now, when?

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