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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Steve Walsh, Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association  
Dr. Michael Callum, Steward Health Care System  
Lora Pellegrini, Massachusetts Association of Health Plans (MAHP)  
Sarah Iselin, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts  
Tara Gregorio, Massachusetts Senior Care Association  
Elissa Sherman, LeadingAge Massachusetts

**FROM:** Kate Walsh, Secretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services *Kew*

**RE:** Strategies to Address Healthcare Capacity

**DATE:** January 9, 2024

The Massachusetts healthcare system continues to face severe capacity challenges as we navigate through the winter months with record hospital occupancy levels, three prevalent viruses circulating, and significant workforce shortages. These issues exist across the system and require immediate, short-term action on all parts to release pressure in the system and support timely patient transitions to the most appropriate care setting. To that end, we have requested, and your respective membership organizations have expressed support for, the following temporary operational and practice flexibilities to mitigate the impacts of this significant surge.

**Health Plans**

Blue Cross Blue Shield MA and MAHP member plans have agreed to voluntarily waive prior authorization beginning on January 9, 2024 and ending on April 1, 2024 for admissions from acute care hospitals to sub-acute care facilities and rehabilitation facilities across commercial, Medicaid, Medicare, and Medicare Advantage lines of business. Plans will encourage self-insured plan sponsors to adopt the waiver.

- The waiver does not apply to long-term or custodial admissions.

- Health plans will be permitted to conduct retrospective and concurrent review during this time to determine appropriateness of level of care.
- Acute care hospitals and post-acute care facilities will be expected to notify plans about any inpatient admission for which post-acute care is anticipated within 24 hours of admission and to provide updates, at a minimum of every 5 days, to support discharge planning.

### **Nursing Facilities**

Nursing facilities have agreed to extend their admissions hours to accept admissions Monday through Saturday from 9am-7pm at a minimum and will continue capacity-building efforts to accommodate admissions 24/7.

### **Hospitals**

Hospitals agree to commence discharge planning and care coordination as early as practicable in the admission and ensure that patients are discharged as early as prudent in the day. Hospitals must also seek innovative ways to improve their staffing plans with a goal to fully staff all licensed adult medical/surgical beds.

Thank you for your collective efforts to support our healthcare system in being able to care for Massachusetts residents during these challenging times. Recognizing that there isn't a single answer, these combined strategies are intended to mitigate further capacity strains and better prepare us for the months ahead. I am grateful for your continued support.

**CC:** Robbie Goldstein, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health