



A Letter from the One Country Board About Potential COVID-19 Stimulus Package

As the United States grapples with how to handle COVID-19 (coronavirus), Congress is now considering a stimulus package to help the economy and Americans deal with the ramifications of the pandemic. As members of the One Country Project, we hope Congress acknowledges the unique challenges rural communities face in daily life, and now in this time of uncertainty.

From school closures to social distancing, the response the COVID-19 is upending the rhythms and routines of rural and Native communities. We hope Congress includes four key provisions in any relief bill it passes.

These key provisions include:

- *Access to SNAP benefits for the millions of rural Americans who face food insecurity*
- *Access to medical providers and care facilities through telehealth*
- *Ability to get tested for COVID-19 through drive-throughs and non-medical facilities*
- *Funding for high-speed broadband in rural areas to help close the “homework gap”*

Addressing Rural Food Insecurity

Rural Americans rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at [higher rates](#) than urban Americans. It’s clear the Trump administration is set on making it harder to stay on SNAP, even in the wake of COVID-19. It [announced](#) Tuesday the stricter requirements would still go into effect on April 1, even as the coronavirus could force low-income workers to go to work sick in order to work the required 20 hours a week to keep food on the table.

We hope the stimulus includes increased benefits and broader eligibility requirements, so Americans are not forced to go into work when they are unwell, further exacerbating the crisis.

Addressing Lack of Health Care Providers

It’s no secret rural America faces a health care problem. Americans are forced to travel long distances to the nearest hospital, which is already at risk of closing. Rural hospitals are also more likely to serve uninsured patients and accept Medicare and Medicaid at a [higher rate](#) than urban hospitals. Further, Native Americans that live on reservations, including tribal elders, face an already underfunded Indian Health Service.

COVID-19 will create a large burden on a rural health care system that is already struggling to recruit and retain primary care and emergency medical doctors. To help alleviate this



shortage, access to telemedicine for rural Americans and Native Americans should be a priority.

Increasing the Availability to Get Tested

Every American should be able to get tested for COVID-19 regardless of income. Further, every American should have the option to get tested. In areas of [California and Michigan](#), patients are able to go through a drive-through to get tested. Rural and Native Americans tend to face greater challenges accessing health care and Congress needs to think creatively to address these unique needs. By decreasing human interaction and expanding testing sites to non-medical facilities, rural Americans will have more opportunity to decrease the spread of the virus.

Increasing Funding for High-Speed Broadband

Access to high-speed broadband is crucial to staying connected. But as rural schools transition to virtual learning, the “homework gap” is becoming even wider. [12 million](#) children live in homes without proper internet connection, putting into question whether or not they can actually “learn from home.” With already low educational achievement levels in rural areas, we cannot afford to widen the gap further.

We are looking forward to the final stimulus package Congress passes, but one thing remains clear: Rural America needs to be considered and factored into all decisions.

– The One Country Project Board (Heidi Heitkamp, Joe Donnelly, Anthony Daniels, and Ashton Clemmons)