



American Academy of
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

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President Biden And Congress Urged to Prepare and Implement National Crisis Management Plan to Address Needs of Millions Suffering from Long COVID

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) today called on President Joe Biden and Congress to gear up for the next coronavirus crisis, by preparing and implementing a comprehensive national plan focused on the needs of millions of individuals suffering from the long-term symptoms of COVID-19.

According to two recent publications from the Journal of the American Medical Association, ten to thirty percent of individuals who had COVID-19 reported at least one persistent symptom up to six months after the virus left their bodies. That means 3 to 10 million Americans are experiencing symptoms of Long COVID or Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC), which are varied and ongoing, including neurological challenges, cognitive problems such as brain fog, shortness of breath, fatigue, pain, and mobility issues.

“We have an opportunity right now to avert the next crisis of the pandemic. We must act now to formulate a national crisis management plan that will help Americans impacted by Long COVID regain quality of life,” said AAPM&R Vice President Steven R. Flanagan, MD, FAAPMR. Dr. Flanagan is the chair and a professor at Rusk Rehabilitation at New York University Langone Health.

In [letters to President Biden and Congress](#) and in a [full-page ad in today’s Washington Post](#), the Academy said the comprehensive national plan must include a commitment to three major components: resources to build necessary infrastructure to meet this crisis, equitable access to care for patients, and research to advance medical understanding of Long COVID.

“The National Institutes of Health (NIH), World Health Organization (WHO), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are focusing on how to advance our understanding and research of Long COVID-related issues. These organizations are critical to advancing the care provided to patients with Long COVID,” he said.

“But how will the U.S. meet the demands of the nearly 10 million people who continue to suffer from long-term symptoms of COVID-19? While progress in the treatment of acute infection and vaccination has been substantial, this will not address the needs of these patients with Long COVID and ongoing disability. Our healthcare commitment cannot ignore this next phase of coronavirus illness,” Flanagan said.



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Flanagan said national direction is needed immediately to help quickly identify and provide the medical expertise and resources that hospitals and community centers need to treat individuals with Long COVID. Multidisciplinary care teams will be required to help individuals reach their highest levels of recovery.

“The good news is that the Biden administration said recovery from COVID-19 is required for economic stability. The bad news is that we will not be able to do that unless and until we have a comprehensive national plan and local healthcare system commitment to enable everyone who had, has or will have COVID to function again as active members of their communities,” he said.

The Academy said the comprehensive national plan should include the following:

Resources to Build Necessary Infrastructure

- Rehabilitation care infrastructure and funding to meet this crisis.
- Resources that local health systems need for the necessary facilities and supplies to support patients and provide expert care.
- Appropriate reimbursement for care.

Equitable Access to Care for Patients

- Timely and local patient access to multidisciplinary care.
- Address inequities in the U.S. healthcare system that result in diminished access to sustained quality care because of racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic factors.
- Access by patients who do not recover quickly to strengthened safety-net care, including disability evaluation and benefits.

Research to Advance Medical Understanding of Long COVID/PASC

- The Academy applauds Congress for funding research, and the current efforts of the NIH, WHO and CDC to advance our understanding and research of Long COVID-related issues.
- As research is conducted, results are needed in real-time to support providers in rapidly developing best practices for care.

The Academy, an organization representing more than 10,000 Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physicians, will share its knowledge and expertise with the White House, Congress, and other medical specialties to help prepare and implement the national crisis management plan. PM&R physicians are uniquely qualified to help guide the multidisciplinary planning effort needed to address the rehabilitation and care needs of this rapidly growing patient population.



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[The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation](#) is the national medical specialty organization representing more than 10,000 physicians who are specialists in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. PM&R physicians, also known as physiatrists, treat a wide variety of medical conditions affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. PM&R physicians evaluate and treat injuries, illnesses, and disability, and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans. Physiatrists utilize cutting-edge as well as time-tested treatments to maximize function and quality of life.

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