



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Opening Statement for Member Briefing on the Administration's Coronavirus Response

United States House of Representatives

Committee on Oversight and Reform

Christi A. Grimm

Principal Deputy Inspector General

Office of Inspector General

Department of Health and Human Services

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Opening Statement (as Prepared for Delivery):

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Principal Deputy Inspector General

Office of Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services

Good morning Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Jordan, Chairman Connolly, and Ranking Member Hice, and other distinguished members of the Committee.

My name is Christi Anne Grimm and I am the Principal Deputy Inspector General at the Department of Health and Human Services. I am a career civil servant with over 21 years of experience in ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in HHS programs and operations. On behalf of HHS-OIG's more than 1,600 dedicated professionals, I appreciate the opportunity to brief you about our oversight of the Department's COVID-19 programs and funding.

The global COVID-19 pandemic creates unprecedented challenges for HHS and for the delivery of health care and human services to the American people. Nearly 100,000 people have died, many thousands more are seriously ill, and the effects are being felt in every corner of the United States. HHS is the lead agency responsible for the public health and medical services response. We have a monumental responsibility, with life and death consequences.

HHS is performing a vital role that covers areas such vaccine development, testing, and guidance for staying safe. We are also deploying medical volunteers to the front lines of health care; working with State, local, and Tribal governments to plan for and respond to surges; and directing billions in Federal funds to bolster health care and human services for those most in need.

In conducting oversight during this pandemic, we are drawing on our long history of overseeing the Department's emergency preparedness and response activities, including responses to hurricanes, other natural disasters, and prior infectious disease outbreaks such as H1N1 flu virus and Ebola virus.

OIG uses expert staff and sophisticated technologies to carry out this work. In addition to performing our oversight, we share our analytics and technical assistance with HHS officials to strengthen program integrity and management practices. We coordinate our work with key

partners, including the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee; Federal, State, local, and Tribal entities; and the Government Accountability Office.

Later today, we will post to our website our strategy for oversight of HHS's COVID-19 response and recovery. Our strategy has four goals: (1) protect people, (2) protect funds, (3) protect infrastructure, and (4) promote effectiveness—now and into the future. To date, we have 14 COVID-19-related reviews posted to our public work plan, with dozens of additional topics in development. We hope that this work will help inform decision makers, including the Department and Congress, as they respond to-19 and prepare for the future.

Our first goal is protecting people. HHS programs touch the lives of all Americans, and our strategy therefore starts with protecting people. Our efforts here are wide-ranging and include health and safety reviews, combating fraud schemes, and issuing information and guidance to the public.

In early April, we released our first report about the impact of the pandemic on health care, results of telephone interviews with hospitals from across the country for the period of March 23 through March 27. We were prompted to conduct this survey because we had prior experience with a study of hospital preparedness following the Ebola outbreak. We used the same random sample of 400 hospitals to collect information about challenges in responding to COVID-19, mitigation strategies hospitals were using to address challenges, and how the Government could best support hospitals responding to COVID-19. The report provided quick and reliable data from the ground to HHS, its operating divisions responsible for oversight and support of hospitals, and to Congress. It also shared practical strategies hospitals reported to us that other hospitals could use in their own responses, including tips about managing patient flow and bed capacity, and helping hospital staff access child care.

This was the first of many ongoing and planned audits and evaluations focused on protecting people during the pandemic, including reviews of the Strategic National Stockpile and COVID-19 laboratory testing. Additional focus areas will include nursing homes, child care facilities, and unaccompanied alien children.

We know from experience that fraud schemes proliferate during emergencies, as greedy perpetrators exploit fear and confusion to steal. It is despicable and it is happening during this pandemic. Scammers are targeting scared Medicare beneficiaries with schemes designed to steal their Medicare numbers. Scammers offer fake treatments and nonexistent vaccines to vulnerable

seniors and others. Most recently, scammers are offering bogus contact tracing, enticing people to click on a malicious link to find out whether they have been exposed to COVID-19. OIG is responding aggressively with our law enforcement partners and bringing these wrongdoers to justice.

Our second goal is to protect HHS funds. OIG oversight of Departmental expenditures has never been more important. As of mid-May 2020, HHS was appropriated \$251 billion for COVID-19 response and recovery. Further, Medicare and Medicaid are responding by implementing significant changes to coverage and other requirements in support of patients and the health care system. These changes include implementing increased funding, such as the 6.2-percent increase in the Federal match for Medicaid.

Ensuring accurate payment is critical to our mission, and OIG's planned work will address contracts, grants, and other program payments. This past Friday, we added a new audit to our public work plan that will determine whether the \$50 billion general distribution from the provider relief fund was correctly calculated and distributed to eligible providers.

We are also working to protect funds in collaboration with Inspector General community partners serving on the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee. The Committee is coordinating holistic oversight of Federal funds appropriated for the COVID-19 response across agencies, to deliver to the American public greater transparency and accountability for Federal dollars.

Our third goal is related to cybersecurity. We seek to protect the health information technology and data infrastructure that is critical to ensuring an effective response, including research.

Our fourth goal is to promote the effectiveness of HHS programs. Of particular interest is the impact of flexibilities offered to providers during the emergency. HHS has waived coverage and payment rules to expedite access to testing and treatment. We are interested in how the waivers affect patients, providers, and programs. For example, we are planning work looking at the impact of expanded telehealth in Medicare.

In conducting our audits, investigations, and evaluations, we are mindful of the critical work and safety of frontline providers and Department staff. It is not surprising that in the crucible of an emergency response, people trying to save lives and livelihoods accept greater risk and sometimes make mistakes or realize unintended negative effects. Through our reviews, we

seek to understand what worked well and what did not, to promote the effectiveness and efficiency of Department programs.

We are balancing the need for robust oversight with minimizing unnecessary burden on providers and program staff caring for communities. As warranted, we are offering deadline extensions, delaying work where access to facilities is unsafe, and adjusting our methods to avoid intruding on care. Recognizing that many Americans have lost loved ones, friends, neighbors, and colleagues to COVID-19, and that others are still bravely fighting the virus, the importance of our mission is clear. We are dedicated to protecting millions of Americans and supporting the health care professionals working so hard to serve the public during these trying times.

In conclusion, I want to thank the Committee for its longstanding and strong support for my office's independent work. I also want to thank the Committee for its oversight work to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability—a mission that is shared across all Offices of Inspector General. I assure you that resources provided to us will be well-spent in service to the American public.

I look forward to discussing our COVID-19-related work with you at this briefing and answering your questions.