

For 15 years, labor unions in North America's Building Trades and companies in the biopharmaceutical industry have developed and advanced a partnership, formalized as the Pharmaceutical Industry Labor-Management Association (PILMA).

The biopharmaceutical industry is a vital sector in the United States, supporting over 4.7 million jobs and remains an important economic driver for the health of our nation. The building trades enjoy a strong relationship with the industry, which requires highly skilled workers to build research and manufacturing facilities to exacting standards. Not only do these companies employ our members to build new facilities, but also to continually retrofit and upgrade existing infrastructure, providing a steady stream of work in their drive to find new discoveries of life-saving medicines.

PILMA and its associated members representing skilled craft union members, first responders and innovator biopharmaceutical companies, have been working to develop vaccines and treatments while providing needed assistance, supplies, and construction work to battle the unprecedented pandemic in COVID-19.

This crisis has also wreaked devastating economic conditions as measures to protect public health have slowed the economy and created unprecedented layoffs and unemployment. As with most economic downturns, this has a manifold impact on the construction sector, as existing projects and those planning to start across every sector have been disrupted including governments and businesses alike.

The coronavirus exacerbates the health care system for a devastated population of Americans without health insurance and deepens for those with coverage tied to their employers. The COVID-19 pandemic is making it difficult or impossible for some employers and employees to pay their share of premiums for health coverage, as many businesses have been forced to shutter operations or vastly scale down their business. According to a survey of business owners, some 24% of employers plan to downsize if the outbreak worsens; another survey found that 18% of adults have already been laid off or their hours have been cut. It is essential that access to care not be curtailed due to a global pandemic with a result of people losing their insurance due to such financial challenges. Employers are seeking policy solutions that prevent the loss of health coverage, protect against overwhelming Medicaid and safety net programs, and offer stability to our frontline hospitals and health care providers.

A recovering economy starts with a healthy workforce. The stress of a laid off or furloughed workforce face excruciating choices in caring for their families. Amid a growing pandemic or possible second wave, an explosion of uninsured workers would have a catastrophic effect on the nation's health and economy.

PILMA has a long-standing commitment to protecting and strengthening the employer-provided health care system upon which over 180 million Americans rely. PILMA also has long supported patient access to needed medicines and treatments.

PILMA believes that Congress and the Trump Administration must take steps to:

- 1) Provide aid for Americans who have lost their health insurance coverage due to a COVID-19 related layoff or furlough by covering the cost of continuing their health coverage through COBRA.
- 2) Support financially struggling employers and health funds to continue offering critical health coverage.
- 3) Enhance availability and affordability of coverage in the individual market for Americans that should have access and need coverage through the Federal or state-based Exchanges and Marketplaces.
- 4) Promote policies that support our essential workers, including those in health care and on the frontline of this crisis. The nation's health – and economy – depends on support for these policies. America's biopharmaceutical companies are collaborating at an unprecedented level to treat and cure this deadly virus, while America's building trades members are leaning in to help in nearly every community in the country with supplies, personal protective equipment, converting and building out treatment centers, and sharing essential information.

Policies that help bridge coverage will prevent a deeper national tragedy and speed efforts to get the American economic engine running again.