TWC COVID-19 Essential Worker – Definition of Health Care Worker Discussion Paper

Background

On March 24, 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission’s (TWC) three-member Commission authorized TWC and Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) to implement emergency child care in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Commission’s actions included the expansion of TWC’s definition of children needing protective services to include children of specified COVID-19 essential workers, and the distribution of $40 million to Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) to support COVID-19 child care related costs.

Additionally, on April 7, 2020, the Commission authorized the prioritization of child care services within the new TWC COVID-19 Essential Workers eligibility category including designating health care workers as a high priority. Based on this action, Boards must prioritize child care services for TWC COVID-19 Essential Workers in the following order:

1. Workers in child care services that support workers in other essential functions
2. Pharmacy workers and health care workers
3. First responders
4. Critical infrastructure workers in grocery, utilities, and trucking
5. Other identified infrastructure workers, which include:
   a. critical state and local government staff;
   b. mail/delivery services;
   c. nursing homes, home health care, and other direct care providers;
   d. banks;
   e. gas stations;
   f. military; and
   g. restaurants and other food delivery
6. Other critical occupations identified by the Board

Additionally, on March 27, 2020, the U.S. Congress enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, providing additional funding to states through the Child Care and Development Block Grant to support child care needs related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. On April 14, 2020, the Commission approved a $200 million distribution of these funds to Boards to fund TWC COVID-19 Essential Worker child care services.

Staff have continued to study the potential need for essential worker child care based on this prioritization as well as the impact of the increased cost of care due to public health policies that limit group sizes and require stronger sanitation and health precautions. Staff has identified that the term, “health care worker” needs clarification to align with the Commission’s intent to ensure child care for those providing the most essential services.
Issue

All health care workers can be considered high priority based on TWC’s current prioritization of essential workers. However, many health care workers provide services that are routine or elective. Additionally, not all health care workers have a high risk of occupational exposure to COVID-19 through the course of their work duties.

For the purposes of prioritizing limited funds, the Commission may consider refining the definition and prioritization of “health care workers” to recognize those whose work is most essential or involves the most risk for occupational exposure to COVID-19.

Decision Points

Staff seeks direction on defining “COVID-19 health care worker” as follows:

A worker who delivers care and services to patients with confirmed, presumed, or suspected COVID-19 infections either directly as doctors and nurses or indirectly as aides, helpers, laboratory technicians, medical waste handlers, and other workers at healthcare facilities who have direct occupational exposure to COVID-19 resulting from the performance of their duties.

Staff also seeks direction on revising the prioritization of workers to provide more clarity surrounding health care occupations as follows:

1. Workers in child care services that support workers in other essential functions
2. Pharmacy workers and, COVID-19 essential health care workers (as defined above)
3. First responders
4. Critical infrastructure workers in grocery, utilities, and trucking
5. Other identified infrastructure workers, which include:
   a. critical state and local government staff;
   b. mail/delivery services;
   c. other essential health care workers (as defined under “Health Care / Public Health” in the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s (CISA) Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19);
   d. banks;
   e. gas stations;
   f. military; and
   g. restaurants and other food delivery
6. Other critical occupations identified by the Board