The California Retailers Association and National Association for Chain Drug Stores are urging California to remove restrictions on pharmacies and pharmacists to allow for point-of-care testing for COVID-19. This move is the latest in efforts by private groups in the health care industry to facilitate testing that will assist in mitigating the pandemic and ultimately reopening the state.

In a letter to Kimberly Kirchmeyer, the director of the California Department of Consumer Affairs, the groups requested that California immediately authorize pharmacies to test for COVID-19 to meet the currently skyrocketing demand. This request would align California with newly issued federal guidance that enables pharmacies and pharmacists to order tests and directly administer tests to the public. On April 8, 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued new guidance allowing pharmacists to order and conduct testing for COVID-19, including serology tests.

The groups also explained that pharmacists – highly trained and among the most accessible health care professionals – are important components of an effective, efficient testing response strategy. The groups noted that expanding testing availability in this manner will help meet the needs of underserved communities.
Thus far, several other states have put policies into place that align with the new federal guidance that allows pharmacies and pharmacists to order and administer COVID-19 tests. These states are Colorado, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Texas.

Looking ahead, the groups urged California to prepare to make any potential COVID-19 vaccine readily available to Californians by confirming that pharmacists will have the ability to administer FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines. This approach would mirror the current approach to administering the flu vaccine, which is available at pharmacies in all 50 states. The groups also requested the ability to substitute therapeutic alternatives when there are shortages of particular drugs. Further, the groups made a number of other specific requests that ask California to comport with various, recently issued federal guidance intended to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, as well as enhance the efficiency of the health care industry as a whole to accommodate an unprecedented demand for health care services.

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