March 17 APG COVID-19 Member Update

Dear APG Members:

We understand that there are many questions around legislative, regulatory, and policy changes impacting the healthcare environment in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19). APG is committed to providing you with a clear understanding of what these changes mean for you, your organizations, and the communities you serve. We will keep you informed through emails—sent on an as needed basis—to ensure you have the latest information on this unprecedented challenge to America's healthcare system.

APG Convenes COVID-19 Advisory Committee
By convening a COVID-19 Advisory Committee, we have tapped into our best resource—our members—to help give us real-time reports from the front lines of healthcare on what's happening in communities across America. And as regulatory and policy changes in response to COVID-19 continue, this group of APG members will assist us in a rapid response strategy to ensure that we are communicating with top Federal officials regarding our members' urgent concerns and issues.

Congress Responds to COVID-19
Congress has responded to COVID-19 with three key pieces of legislation. First, Congress passed the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act in which $8.3 billion of funds were released to assist the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), States and the Small Business Administration (SBA). This legislation allowed HHS to begin deploying resources for testing and screening.

Second, the House of Representatives passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This bill responds to the coronavirus outbreak by providing paid sick leave and free coronavirus testing, expanding food assistance and unemployment benefits, and requiring employers to provide additional protections for health care workers. This second stimulus bill is currently in the Senate and is scheduled to be fast-tracked for approval.

Finally, both the Senate and House are moving quickly on a third piece of legislation primarily aimed at providing relief for small businesses and industries ravaged by COVID-19. Both Democrat and Republican senators are expected to release versions of “Phase 3” legislation shortly—possibly as soon as late this week. This third stimulus bill will possibly include relief for healthcare providers. We are in dialogue with both the Senate Finance Committee and the appropriate House committees regarding needs and concerns from our members to ensure that the front-line providers are allocated financial relief.

President Trump Declares COVID-19 a National Emergency
Last week, President Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency. Under a national emergency, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is allowed to waive certain Medicare and Medicaid rules and regulations under what’s known as Section 1135 authority. In order to gain additional flexibility in their Medicaid programs, states must apply to CMS for Section 1135 waiver requests.
Florida was the first state to apply for a Section 1135 waiver. Today, CMS announced that they approved additional flexibilities for the state.

Please click here to read the CMS press release on today’s announcement. Click here to read Florida’s approval letter.

We recommend that members have conversations with appropriate state health department in support of having their State submit a waiver to greater provider flexibility in caring for patients.

**CMS Expands Telehealth Coverage**
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CMS today expanded telehealth coverage for people in Medicare. This expansion will allow patients to receive vital health services without having to travel to a doctor’s office or other healthcare facility, thus helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. You can find a fact sheet with more information here and a FAQ here. Please download these documents as they will be useful for your providers.

**APG, Premier Send Letter to HHS, CMS**
APG and Premier Inc. sent a joint letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar and CMS Administrator Seema Verma in which they urged HHS to provide guidance on financial and quality mitigation policies for all quality programs and value-based arrangements in response to the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

Please click here to view the letter.

We are here to serve as a resource for you. Please don’t hesitate to contact me here with any questions you may have or any situations within your practice that you want me to be aware of.

As always, please know that we are in constant contact with federal and agency officials and will share any additional news with you as soon as possible.