



July 14, 2020

Welcome to America's Physician Groups' "Healthcare on the Hill," where you can get the latest on healthcare happenings in our nation's capital--and with a special focus on the value-based care movement.

As our nation--and the world--continues to face the many challenge presented by COVID-19, we are working to ensure you have the very latest information on the virus and our rapidly changing healthcare landscape.

*Think someone else may enjoy "Healthcare on the Hill?" **Forward this email and have them click [here](#) to be added to our subscription list.** And remember, you can always visit our [website](#) for more news and resources.*

Valinda Rutledge
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CMS Releases Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments for COVID Testing

Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released a [list](#) of Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments for the testing requirements surrounding COVID-19 as well as the payment. The amendments included Medicare payment amounts for lab services and points of clarification for Medicare payment policies surrounding testing for the virus.

The agency has clarified that:

- Medicare beneficiaries may receive COVID-19 testing and laboratory tests for influenza and respiratory syncytial virus without an order from the treating physician or other practitioners
- Medicare will cover COVID-19 testing when ordered by any healthcare professional authorized to do so under state law
- Medicare will pay labs to send technicians to the beneficiaries who are homebound and unable to travel
- A home health nurse may collect a lab sample as part of a normal home visit for home health service beneficiaries
- Visiting nurses working for rural health clinics can collect lab samples while conducting a home visit under certain conditions
- Medicare will pay healthcare providers who have set-up off-site testing to collect samples as normal

APG has been carefully assessing the rapidly evolving guidance on the use of testing in the physician practice and embarked upon extensive advocacy efforts both on our own and with other Associations on behalf of our members. We are pleased to see those efforts have led to greater clarity on Medicare payment and we will continue to monitor developments during the pandemic.

Additional Funding Released for Hospitals and Dentists

This week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the release of \$3B of additional funding for hospitals who have been hardest hit by serving vulnerable patients and \$1B for rural hospitals and some urban hospitals serving Medicare patients. In addition, HHS announced the opening of a portal to allow dentists to seek Provider Relief Funding.

APG has advocated strongly for the release of additional funds for practices hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, including in letters to both [CMS](#) and [Congress](#). The previous provider relief allocation for “hot spots” went to hospitals based on the total number of intensive care unit beds and total number of admissions with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. Physician practices were unable to participate in this previous allocation of relief. We will continue to advocate for additional financial relief efforts for practices throughout the pandemic.

CMS Releases 2018 QPP Report

Last week, CMS released a [2018 Quality Payment Program \(QPP\) Experience Report](#) which includes data on the performance in MIPS and APM tracks in the QPP. Key findings of the report include:

- 98 percent of MIPS-eligible clinicians participated in the program and avoided a negative payment adjustment, a one-year increase of 3 percentage points

- 84 percent of clinicians earned an “exceptional performance” designation by earning 70 points or more
- 356,353 MIPS-eligible clinicians participated in MIPS through a MIPS APM, a 15,000-clinician increase from the 2017 performance year
- The number of clinicians achieving Qualifying APM Participant (QP) status nearly doubled in one year, from 99,076 to 183,306 clinicians. This, along with the increase in MIPS APM participation, indicates a desire from clinicians and practices to transition toward risk-based value-based arrangements.
- 84 percent of small practices earned a positive payment adjustment, up 10 percentage points from the year prior

APG has recently focused extensive advocacy efforts on modifying the threshold for achieving Qualifying APM Participant (QP) status to ensure that both Congress and federal agencies continue to support the move from volume to value within our healthcare system. We also wrote to CMMI outlining the issues in the identification of providers that are used to calculate the threshold scores within an APM. We will continue to highlight the importance of supporting these programs and monitor relevant developments as they occur.

Biden and Sanders Form Task Force

Last week, former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) announced the details of their “Unity Task Force” in a [110-page policy paper](#). The task force includes several democratic leaders and policy experts. The paper outlines issues the task force will focus on leading up to the November elections. The issues include climate change, criminal justice reform, economy, education, health care, and immigration. Biden stated that, “united party is key to defeating” the president in six months, as well as “moving our country forward through an unprecedented crisis.” The key healthcare priorities were:

- Providing free public health testing, vaccines, and treatment
- Covering the cost of COBRA insurance for workers with that option
- Reopening the Affordable Care Act marketplaces, even outside of the normal open enrollment season, and expand subsidies to make it easier for people to buy coverage
- Automatically enrolling people in a public option with an opt-out when an individual’s COBRA eligibility expires for those qualifying for free premiums
- Providing direct, increased support to states to enroll eligible adults in Medicaid, have the federal government cover a higher percentage of the bill, and add incentives for states which have not yet expanded Medicaid to do so

- Keeping these emergency measures in place until the pandemic ends and unemployment falls significantly

Part II - APG Hosts Webinar “Racism: A Public Health Crisis in America”

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the health inequities toward communities of color in our country. Additionally, the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery have highlighted that racism is an urgent threat to our public health. The anguish of our communities has torn at the fabric of our society.

America's Physician Groups would like to invite you to our second in a series of an open, nonjudgmental dialogue on **Friday, July 17 at 2:00 pm ET**, about racism in our country—and how we all have to elevate this public health concern to mission critical status to improve health, offer hope and advance healing for every patient.

[Register today](#) and hear from our expert panel including **Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, Immediate Past President, American Medical Association, Marya T. Mtshali, Ph.D., Lecturer in Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality at Harvard University, and Osehotue Okojie, MD, Chairwoman DFW Healthcare Partners IPA, APG Member.**

[Register Now!](#)

Friday, July 17 at 2:00 pm ET / 11:00 am PT

Our first webinar in this series was held on July 8 and featured **VADM Jerome M. Adams, U.S. Surgeon General, Sachin Jain, MD, President and CEO of SCAN Group and SCAN Health Plan, and Eugene A. Woods, President and CEO of Atrium Health.** If you were unable to attend, you can download the recording [here](#).



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