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**March 30, 2021**

*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 challenges presented by COVID-19, we are working to ensure you have the very latest information on the virus and our rapidly changing healthcare landscape.*

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**Valinda Rutledge**  
**Executive Vice President of Federal Affairs**  
**America's Physician Groups**

**APG Sends Letter to Schumer on the Need for Additional Funding for Providers**

Last week, APG sent a [letter](#) to Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) asking that as Congress continues its efforts to provide relief for providers and other healthcare entities in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. APG is also calling on Congress to help physicians by considering authorizing forgiveness of the loans provided by the accelerated and advanced payment programs and to delay the Medicare sequestration.

In a statement issued by Don Crane, President and CEO, APG, "the COVID-19 pandemic has caused extensive financial stress for physician practices that are not affiliated with a hospital," Unfortunately, the previous distribution of PRF dollars were directed mostly

toward hospitals. It's imperative that that we now direct any additional PRF financial assistance to these physician practices that have spent thousands of dollars in investments for telehealth services, waiving patient co-pays, and providing COVID testing and vaccinations.”

### **House Introduces Bill Allowing for Audio-Only Telehealth Services Under Medicare Advantage**

Last week, [The Ensuring Parity in MA and PACE for Audio-Only Telehealth Act](#) (HR 2166) was introduced in the House of Representatives that would allow the use of audio-only telehealth services under Medicare Advantage (MA). The bill, sponsored by Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL), was originally introduced into Congress in July 2020 as part of its previous session. While the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) currently allows providers to offer telehealth services under MA, it is only if a video component is included. The legislation that has been introduced seeks to allow audio-only telehealth services as an option for lower-income or rural patients who may not have access to video technology or the requisite broadband internet services. The bill would also require MA plans to reimburse providers for audio-only telehealth as if the visits were in person unless both parties agree to a separate policy.

While a Senate companion bill, [S.4840](#), did exist in the previous Congressional session and was introduced by Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS), a companion bill to the current HR 2166 has yet to be reintroduced.

### **Senate Passes Bill to Extend Sequestration Moratorium**

Last Thursday, the Senate passed [legislation](#) extending the suspension of the two-percent sequestration cuts to Medicare payments by a 90-2 vote. The moratorium first began as part of the CARES Act last year and was extended several times then, most recently in the December federal spending bill. While the House of Representatives passed a similar bill weeks ago, the chamber will not take up the Senate version until next month once it returns from recess. The House version of the moratorium included a delay of the additional four percent cut to Medicare payments that were part of the Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) law while the Senate version did not.

APG has been very involved with its advocacy efforts for the extension of the sequester and we were pleased to see the Senate legislation.

### **Senate Confirms the New Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for HHS**

The Senate confirmed Dr. Vivek Murthy as the new Surgeon General. Murthy previously served as the Surgeon General in the Obama administration. The Senate also confirmed Dr. Rachel Levine to serve as the Assistant Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Levin is a pediatrician and former Health Secretary of Pennsylvania.

## Administration Extends Open Enrollment

Due to the pandemic, the Administration is extending the open enrollment to August 15.

### [Launch of APG Direct Contracting Coalition](#)

CMMI announced that the **Global/Professional Direct Contracting** will start April 1<sup>st</sup> and the participation agreements and other associated documents were distributed to participants. APG has been working hard to help your organizations prepare for the launch of this model, but we know that with the recent delay by CMMI of the GEO model and the whirlwind of the past year has likely made many of you unsure on what to do next. Have no fear, we are here to help!

**APG will be sponsoring and supporting the launch of a special coalition for current and potential Direct Contracting participants so that we can exchange information, share best practices, and collaborate on advocacy opportunities** that will strengthen your experience under Direct Contracting. We want to help ensure success for all participants!

You do not need to be an APG member to join.

If you belong to a healthcare **organization interested in joining our coalition and qualify as a potential or current Direct Contracting participant**, please submit a name and contact information to **Shelley Robinette** ([srobinette@apg.org](mailto:srobinette@apg.org)).

**We look forward to creating an opportunity for everyone to have the best possible experience in Direct Contracting!**



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This message was sent to [srobinette@apg.org](mailto:srobinette@apg.org) from:

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