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June 9, 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.

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***Valinda Rutledge
Executive Vice President of Federal Affairs
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APG Signs onto Letter Urging HHS to Act on Audio-Only Telehealth Services

On June 3, APG along with 20 organizations sent a [letter](#) to HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra and CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure urging the agency to recognize the importance of audio-only telehealth services for the more than 26 million seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage.

The organizations who represent patients, providers, payers, employers, and health systems expressed the need for all American's to have access to high quality, affordable health care. Medicare has a unique role in protecting access to healthcare, especially

during the pandemic when so many American's relied on telehealth services.

The inability to include audio-only encounters by Medicare Advantage plans is even more glaring given separate guidance issued by CMS in the Federal Marketplace. It is fundamentally unfair to seniors to apply different standards from one federal program to another, unreasonably limiting the ability to fully and properly document risk to select programs.

The group requested that CMS allow diagnoses from Medicare Advantage audio-only telehealth encounters to be included in risk adjustment calculations, consistent with CMS' treatment of risk adjustment in the ACA Marketplaces.

CMS Holds Listening Session on the APP and Quality Measures

On Thursday, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) held a listening session on the use of the Alternative Payment Model Performance Pathway (APP) for Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) eligible clinicians. CMS sought feedback from stakeholders on the challenges they face in reporting under the APP and how the agency can improve the pathway, including MIPS quality measures and possibly expanding the MIPS quality measures that ACOs could report for Shared Savings Program ACOs.

APG has been a vocal advocate for making changes to the MSSP quality performance standard beginning in 2022, including sending a [letter](#) to CMS outlining our recommendations for how to improve the category through extending the option for CMS Web Interface reporting until issues have been addressed, removing the all-payer requirement for measures reporting, and setting shared savings eligibility standards by using a target that is established and published in advance. APG will continue to meet with CMS to extensively discuss the impact of these changes on members and their practices over the coming months.

President Releases His Proposed 2022 Budget

Last week, President Biden released his over \$6 trillion budget for 2022 that included increases in spending on infrastructure, childcare, climate change, tax reform, and a 23 percent increase to HHS funding. To entice the remaining 12 states that have yet to expand their Medicaid programs under the Affordable Care Act, President Biden suggested offering "Medicaid-like coverage through a federal public option, paired with financial incentives to ensure states maintain their existing expansions."

In other healthcare budgetary spending, in addition to its investments in maternal health, the President has requested an extension of the expanded health insurance tax credits in the American Rescue Plan by making them permanent, extending coverage to four million additional uninsured persons. To date, they have lowered premiums for 9 million current

enrollees by an average of \$50 per person per month. \$17 million is proposed to set up a dispute resolution process for the 340B drug discount program and \$400 million in grants toward the expansion of telehealth services that could include money for pilots and demonstrations on the use of electronic health records to coordinate rural veterans with providers and the Veterans Affairs EHR system. You can find the budget fact sheet [here](#) and HHS' budget in brief [here](#).

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