



Welcome to *Washington Update*, the weekly e-newsletter on the latest health care happenings in the nation's capital that affect APC's members.

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Electronic Prior Authorization, Public Health Data Exchange Among Areas Addressed In Health Information Technology Proposed Rule

APG members and other health care providers could be better positioned to rapidly exchange electronic health information with other partners, including payers and public health authorities, under a proposed new federal [rule](#). The rule, which aims to improve data exchange for purposes as diverse as electronic prior authorization and pandemic response, was released for public comment this month by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC).

Key features of the rule are [updated data standards](#) and two new sets of [certification criteria](#) for the [electronic health record systems](#) (EHRs) now used throughout much of U.S. health care. The certification criteria are aimed at ensuring so-called “end-to-end interoperability” so that information can not only be exchanged, but also acted upon, by various entities. One set of the new criteria is aimed at exchanging public health data, such as among providers, local public health agencies, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Another set, aimed primarily at payers, was developed in tandem with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and is aimed at facilitating processes such as electronic prior authorization.

Other aspects of the proposed rule include the following:

- Updates to technology and standards to enhance the exchange of clinical images, such as X-rays, and to adopt multi-factor authentication for security purposes;
- An EHR certification criterion applying to a new prescription benefit tool that would provide specific information for patients and providers about the costs of drugs and potential alternatives;
- A new exception to [information blocking](#) rules that would protect entities that limit the sharing of patients' reproductive health care information under certain circumstances. The measure builds on other [steps](#) taken recently by the Department of Health and Human Services to protect patients' privacy and confidentiality when obtaining lawful reproductive services.

Comments on the proposed rule will be due 60 days following publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register. The next ONC information session on the proposed rule will take place on July 30 at 2 pm ET; register [here](#). More information can be found at healthit.gov/proposedrule and via ONC's X account, [@ONC_HealthIT](#).



In Case You Missed It

- The primary driver of **U.S. consumers' medical debt** is high health care prices – especially for hospital care – and policies such as removing medical collections from credit reports are unlikely to produce big improvements in household finances, witnesses told lawmakers at a recent Senate [hearing](#). Their testimony came as Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA), the chair and ranking member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, sparred over the merits of the Sanders-sponsored [Medical Debt Cancellation Act](#), which would eliminate \$220 billion in medical debt held by Americans.
- Separately, the HELP committee's leadership agreed on one item: That the panel [will vote next week](#) on whether to consider a vote by the full panel to investigate the bankrupt Steward Health Care system and its chief executive officer, Ralph de la Torre, M.D. Sens. Sanders and Cassidy wrote in a joint statement that de la Torre would be asked to testify at a hearing on "How Management Decisions Have Impacted Patient Care" on September 12th.
- Proposed bipartisan [legislation](#) that would hike penalties for failure to comply with the existing federal hospital price transparency [rule](#), codify a separate transparency [rule](#) imposed on payers, and **extend price transparency requirements to clinical diagnostic labs, imaging centers, and ambulatory surgical centers**, was a key focus of a recent Senate Aging Committee [hearing](#). The

session came amid ongoing concerns that many hospitals are [still not fully compliant](#) with transparency regulations that took effect in 2021.



APG Announcements And Offerings

- APG submitted a [comment letter](#) in response to the Senate RFI on the Pay PCPs Act. As described earlier in [Washington Update](#), the proposed legislation would create a new hybrid payment model for primary care providers that would convert a portion of their Medicare fee-for-service payment into a prospective capitated payment.
- The next APG **MSSP Coalition** webinar will take place on **Thursday, August 1, 12:00 - 1:00 pm EDT**. Members can register [here](#).
- APG will host an **educational webinar on CMS's Proposed Rule** for the 2025 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule on **Thursday, August 1**, from **3:00-4:00pm EDT**. Register [here](#).
- The next **APG Hosted Webinar, "Unlock Cost Savings Via A Proven And Scalable Dementia Care Program,"** will take place on **Tuesday, August 13, 2:00-3:00 pm EDT**. The webinar will be presented by Ceresti Health. For more information, including the learning objectives and speakers, [click here](#). Members can register [here](#).
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).
- Mark your calendars now for the upcoming **APG Annual Fall Conference 2024**, which will be held November 11 – 13 in Washington, DC.

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