June 15, 2018: National Advocacy Update

About AMA's amicus brief to defend patients' ACA coverage

In an AMA Wire® Leadership Viewpoints column, new AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD, writes:

"This week, the AMA—along with the American College of Physicians, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry—filed an amicus brief (PDF) in response to the court case, Texas v. United States. With this action, the AMA opposes a lawsuit that would undermine the policies supported by our House of Delegates, including expanded health insurance coverage and other important patient protections.

"This lawsuit challenges the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), arguing that Congressional action that reduced the tax on individuals who fail to comply with the individual mandate to purchase insurance voids the law itself. The Trump administration announced that it wouldn't defend the law.

"If the plaintiffs are successful, important patient protections and insurance reforms that are current law would cease to exist. These include:

- Patients would no longer have protections for pre-existing conditions.
- Children would no longer have coverage under their parents' health insurance plan until age 26.
- Insurers would no longer be held to the 85 percent medical loss ratio, meaning they could generate higher profits at the expense of coverage and payments for services.
- 100 percent coverage for certain preventive services would cease.
- Annual and life-time dollar limits could be reinstated, leading to more bankruptcies due to health care costs."

Read more at AMA Wire.
House, Senate continue consideration of opioid abuse legislation

During the week of June 11, the U.S. House of Representatives passed nearly 40 opioid-related bills. The House is expected to vote on at least 20 additional policies next week, likely packaged into a handful of bills. This concludes a renewed effort by multiple House Committees to develop additional policies to address the opioid epidemic.

In the Senate, the Committee on Finance approved the Helping to End Addiction and Lessen (HEAL) Substance Use Disorders Act of 2018 by a vote of 27-0. The bill constitutes a collection of over 20 individual bills to address opioid abuse disorder which were introduced by members of the committee on a bipartisan basis. The AMA will continue to seek improvements to this bill prior to Senate floor consideration.

It is expected that this bill will be merged into a package of opioid bills that includes bills previously adopted by the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, the Judiciary Committee, and the Commerce Committee, and debated by the full Senate at a time to be determined. The AMA will remain engaged with members and stakeholders as this issue is debated in the Senate, and later reconciled between the two chambers.

New Medicare Card: MBI look-up tool available through your MAC

As noted in previous editions of AMA Advocacy Update, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is issuing new Medicare cards to beneficiaries to help reduce patient identity theft. The cards have new Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) numbers that do not use the beneficiary’s social security number.

As a result of AMA advocacy, CMS designed a look-up tool for practices to find a beneficiary’s new number if the beneficiary does not bring his or her new card to their appointment. The look-up tool is now ready for use. If you don't already have access, sign up for your Medicare Administrative Contractor's (MAC) secure portal to use the tool.

The tool uses four data elements about the patient to return the MBI if CMS has already mailed the new Medicare card to that patient. Medicare is mailing new cards in phases by geographic location (PDF). New cards are currently being mailed to people who:

For more information about the MBI, visit the AMA's New Medicare Card page or read this MLN Matters® Special Edition Article (PDF).

More articles in this issue

- June 15, 2018: Advocacy spotlight on News and views from the 2018 AMA Annual Meeting
- June 15, 2018: State Advocacy Update
- June 15, 2018: Judicial Advocacy Update