

# COVID-19: Advocacy Progress Report

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Updated Feb. 10, 2021

The AMA is fighting every day to remove the obstacles physicians face while confronting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following AMA actions have been taken to help frontline personnel, practices and hospitals, including an urgent appeal to the administration for more supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE).

The AMA is listening to physicians and will continue to channel their collective voices into action.

## January 2021

- Sign-on letter to Congressional Leaders (PDF), requesting support for the inclusion of bipartisan "Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act," S. 54, within the next coronavirus response package.

## December 2020

### Dec. 23

- Comment letter (PDF) to CMS regarding the additional policy and regulatory revision in response to COVID-19 public health emergency.

### Dec. 17

- Letter to Don Rucker (PDF), providing comments to Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology regarding its interim final rule with comment period, entitled "Information Blocking and the ONC Health IT Certification Program: Extension of Compliance Dates and Timeframes in Response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency."
- Letter to Congressional Leaders (PDF), asking them to pass legislation this year that further

postpones the application of the this harmful 2% cut for the duration of the public health emergency in 2021 related to the CARES Act.

## **Dec. 7**

| Letter to Brad Schneider and David McKinley (PDF), expressing support for H.R. 8840, the “Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act of 2020.”

## **November 2020**

### **Nov. 20**

| Letter to DEA (PDF) providing feedback about the prescription and treatment flexibilities authorized during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, recommending that all flexibilities that have been put in place be kept in place until both the COVID-19 and opioid overdose public health emergencies come to an end.

### **Nov. 17**

| Letter to President Trump (PDF) urging the administration to work closely with the Biden transition team to share all critical information related to COVID-19.

## **October 2020**

### **Oct. 21**

| Sign-on letter to Congressional leaders (PDF) urging them to work on legislation to provide sequester relief into 2021.

### **Oct. 2**

| Letter to Alex Azar (PDF) asking that the administration fully support the work of the career scientists at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and that there not be attempts to override the FDA process for evidence-based review of vaccine candidates.

## September 2020

### Sept. 2

| Letter to Lamar Alexander (PDF) expressing support for S. 4375, the “Telehealth Modernization Act of 2020,” which would make telehealth technology available to all Medicare patients regardless of where they live or how they access telehealth services.

## August 2020

### Aug. 27

| Letters to Representatives (PDF) Max Rose and David McKinley and Senators Tim Kaine, Todd Young, Jack Reed and Bill Cassidy voicing support for H.R. 8094/S.4349, the “Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Act.”

| Letter to Stephen Hahn (PDF) calling on the FDA to work closely with physicians to provide transparency and timely information on COVID-19 vaccines.

### Aug. 25

| Letter to FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn (PDF) urging the FDA to work more closely with the physician community to develop a plan for further education and transparency surrounding COVID-19 vaccine candidates.

### Aug. 14

| Sign-on letter to Congressional leaders (PDF) supporting provisions in National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would preserve current medical staffing levels in the military and delay any realignments or reductions.

### Aug. 11

Sign-on letter to Alex Azar (PDF) recommending that the administration update testing prioritization guidelines to ensure that those with medically-indicated need for COVID-19 diagnostic testing can have timely access.

## Aug. 7

Letter to Chief of Staff Meadows (PDF) urging the administration to immediately address issues surrounding the repayment terms of the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Program in an Executive Order.

## Aug. 6

Letter to Representatives Krishnamoorthi and Katko (PDF) expressing support for H.R. 7255, the “Coronavirus Health Care Worker Wellness Act,” which would bolster mental health services for front-line physicians responding to COVID-19.

## July 2020

### July 25

Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) asking Congress to clarify and correct the unintentional tax consequences of policies meant to provide vital funding to health care providers through the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) and other programs as part of the nation’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### July 22

Joint letter with AHA and ANA to Senate leadership (PDF), requesting that Congress allocate an additional \$100 billion to the emergency relief fund to provide direct funding to front line health care personnel and providers in the next COVID-19 relief package.

Sign-on letter to Seema Verma (PDF) , urging CMS to sunset waivers involving scope of practice and licensure when the public health emergency concludes.

### July 20

Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) asking for federal funding to ensure the proper tools and resources are in place so that each state can mount robust contact tracing efforts.

## July 17

Joint letter with AHA and ANA to Senate leadership (PDF) requesting relief provisions on the COVID-19 relief bill on disparities affecting racial, ethnic and marginalized communities. The provisions recommended would help to ensure equitable treatment, disseminate timely, relevant, culturally appropriate and culturally responsive public health information and address the social determinants and root causes of health, including structural racism.

## July 16

Sign-on letter to Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf and Deputy Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Matthew Albence (PDF), urging U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to release all children together with their parents and caregivers from ICE-run family residential centers.

## July 2

Letter to Rep. Robin Kelly (PDF) expressing support for H.R. 6585 “Equitable Data Collection and Disclosure on COVID-19 Act.” Under this legislation the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will obtain and post data that is disaggregated by race, sex, age, tribal affiliation, socioeconomic status, disability status and country.

## July 1

Letter to Chairman Clyburn and Ranking Member Scalise (PDF) outlining recommendations as to how to prepare for a future public health emergency based on what we have learned during our response to COVID-19, particularly the need to increase production and availability of personal protective equipment (PPE).

## June 2020

### June 30

- | Letter to FEMA (PDF) urging them to help non-hospital physicians in securing PPE, disinfectants and sanitizers as they begin to reopen their practices.
- | Letter to Vice President Pence (PDF) urging the administration to utilize the Defense Production Act to make sure there is sufficient PPE for physicians in all settings, especially non-hospital physicians as they begin to resume treating patients.

### June 26

- | Letter to the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (PDF) urging the administration to consider J-1 and H-1B International Medical Graduates (IMGs) and their families' entry into the U.S. to be in the national interest of the country so that these physicians can begin providing valuable medical services to U.S. patients and ease the burden on the U.S. physician workforce.

### June 25

- | Letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) encouraging them to ensure that digital health innovations, specifically as they pertain to telehealth and virtual health options in response to COVID-19, are preserved for Medicare patients after the national public health emergency has expired.
- | Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) seeking Congressional action to clarify and correct the unintentional tax consequences of policies meant to provide vital funding to health care providers through the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) and other programs as part of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### June 17

- | Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) urging them to extend eligibility for the PPP loan program to include Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(6) nonprofit organizations in the final version of the next COVID-19 aid package.

### June 9

- | Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) urging them to include targeted and limited

liability protections for physicians in the next COVID-19 relief package.

## May 2020

### May 29

Sign-on letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) calling on Congress to enhance federal financing for the Medicaid program by at least 12 percentage points, with additional support for those states hardest hit.

### May 28

Letter to Senate leadership (PDF) asking them to address several high priority issues in the next COVID relief package that will help to secure the viability of physician practices. These include restarting and enhancing the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Program, allocating additional funding for the HHS Emergency Relief Fund and its expansion to Medicaid providers, developing a network for mass distribution of PPE and sanitizing supplies, and broader liability protections for physicians.

Letter to Vice President Mike Pence (PDF) urging the administration to provide additional assistance to non-hospital physicians in securing PPE, disinfectants and sanitizers so that they can begin to safely reopen.

### May 27

Letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar (PDF) urging the agency to expeditiously address distribution of testing funding, Indian Health Service funding and provider relief funding to tribal hot spots and in rural areas so that native communities are able to better assess the rate of COVID-19 infection and target necessary health care resources accordingly.

Sign-on letter to Congress (PDF) calling on federal lawmakers to enact temporary and targeted liability relief legislation that would ensure protections that would safeguard businesses, non-profit organizations, educational institutions and health care providers and facilities from unfair lawsuits so they can continue to contribute to a robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### May 21

Sign-On letter to Acting Homeland Secretary and the Deputy Directory of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (PDF) speaking out strongly against a policy of forcing immigrant

families at the border to choose between remaining indefinitely detained with their children or relinquishing custody of their children and being separated. This issue has heightened urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Read more.](#)

## May 20

| [Letters to Representatives Schrier, Roe, Morelle and Van Drew \(PDF\)](#) and [Senator Tina Smith \(PDF\)](#) expressing support for the passage of the “Health Care at Home Act” which expands coverage for telehealth services for health plans regulated by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

## May 15

| [Letter to House leadership \(PDF\)](#) expressing support for the many provisions in the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES Act) that provide stability for physician practices and promote public health by enabling physicians to continue caring for patients during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

| [Letter to Representatives Schneider, King, Sewell and Davis \(PDF\)](#) and [Letter to Senators Shaheen and Bennet \(PDF\)](#) thanking them for introducing the Medicare Accelerated and Advance payments Improvement Act of 2020 which ensures that once the immediate public health emergency has passed there is still a stable, accessible and physician practice-based health system in place that can administer quality care.

## May 14

| [Sign-on letter to CMS Administrator Seema Verma \(PDF\)](#) urging the agency to make policy and regulatory revisions that would help the Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP) achieve the long-term sustainability necessary to enhance care coordination and lower the growth rate of health care spending while improving quality of care.

## May 11

| [Letter to Representative Carolyn Maloney \(PDF\)](#) voicing the AMA’s strong support for H.R. 6720 the “Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act.”

## May 8

| [Letter to Reps Schneider, Finkenauer, Cole and Bacon \(PDF\)](#) urging the House of Representatives to quickly pass the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act which would



enable 15,000 physicians to join the frontlines as quickly as possible.

## May 4

| [Letter to Vice President Mike Pence \(PDF\)](#) urging the administration to allow J-1, H-1B and O-1 International Medical Graduates (IMGs) to be exempt from any future immigration bans or limitations so that these physicians can maintain their lawful non-immigrant status while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

| [Sign-on letter to Congressional Leadership \(PDF\)](#) the AMA alongside 77 other medical associations urging Congress to take regulatory or legislative action to maintain work authorization for individuals currently in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status during the COVID-19 national emergency.

## April 2020

### April 28

| [Letter to Congressional leadership \(PDF\)](#) the AMA, alongside 31 other groups, is calling on Congress to take immediate action to support employers and workers by protecting and expanding high quality, affordable health care coverage.

| [Letter to CMS Administrator Seema Verma \(PDF\)](#) urging the agency to quickly reinstate the Accelerated and Advance Payment Program (AAP) and to specifically authorize advance payments or retainer payments by state Medicaid programs to provide critically needed funds to Medicaid physicians, clinicians and other providers and suppliers.

### April 27

| [Letter to the Assistant Secretary for Health \(PDF\)](#) making recommendations on diagnostic and serological COVID-19 tests and recommending that the Administration provide physicians and the general public additional guidance about the performance and limitations of these tests including the risks for false positives

### April 20

| [Letter to National Governors Association \(PDF\)](#) calling on governors to adopt broader civil immunity to remove barriers for physicians responding to the call to action in areas experiencing a surge in COVID-19 patients.

## April 17

Letter to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (PDF) asking them to clarify the proper use of the United States International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM) codes, citing concerns that the current coding schema is insufficient to fully identify all patients who have become ill from COVID-19.

## April 16

Letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar (PDF) urging the department to use its existing authority to address disparities in the federal response to COVID-19 including increasing the availability of testing, ensuring access to equitable treatment and disseminating timely, relevant and culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive public health information.

## April 15

Letter to Congressional leadership (PDF) AMA along with all state medical associations and 89 national medical specialty societies wrote to Congress as members consider a “phase four” coronavirus relief legislative package urging them to take additional steps to protect patient access to care by preserving the viability of physician practices.

Letter to Eugene Scalia, Secretary U.S. Department of Labor (PDF) urging the department to issue guidance to Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) health plans to expand the use of telemedicine during this pandemic. It is critical that telemedicine, as a means to allowing patients to safely access covered care during this emergency, is available to all. Medicare and many states have taken action to expand access and the AMA is urging the DOL to help push ERISA plans to catch up.

## April 13

Letter to FEMA (PDF) urging the creation of a national system for acquisition of PPE as well as a system of distribution managed by the federal government so that a healthy physician workforce can be maintained in both hospital and laboratory settings.

Letter to the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use (SAMHSA) (PDF) urging SAMHSA to provide increased flexibility for physicians treating patients with an opioid use disorder by allowing them to satisfy the in-person evaluation requirement via telemedicine for the duration of the COVID-19 public health crisis.

## April 10

Letter to the National Governors Association, National Council of Insurance Legislators (PDF) and the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (PDF) urging policy changes to ensure that patients will have immediate and long-term access to their physicians. AMA urges every state to adopt telehealth policies that reflect what is being required under Medicare, grace periods and other continuity of coverage policies and asks that immediate steps be taken to prevent insurers' administrative requirements from delaying care and payment and undercutting practice resources.

## April 8

Sign-on letter to CMS Administrator Seema Verma (PDF) urging CMS to provide payment parity between telehealth visits and regular office visits and provide guidance to Medicare Administrative Contractors to ensure that recent CMS guidance and rules are followed appropriately to enable the payment of telephone E/M claims.

## April 7

Letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar (PDF) urging HHS to provide one month of revenue to each physician (MD or DO), nurse practitioner and physician assistant enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid to account for financial losses and non-reimbursable expenses during the COVID-19 response.

## April 3

Letter to the National Governor's Association (PDF) AMA wrote to the National Governors Association (NGA) regarding state emergency orders to close non-essential businesses, limit non-essential activities and prohibit gatherings during this critical stage of conducting a uniform national response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Letter to Mike Pence and Acting Director Kenneth Cuccinelli (PDF) urging the administration to permit international medical graduate (IMG) physicians to serve at multiple locations and facilities to provide greater access to health care for millions of Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sign-on letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar (PDF) imploring HHS agencies to coordinate comprehensive collection and public dissemination of COVID-19 testing, hospitalizations and mortality rates by race and ethnicity and patients' preferred spoken and written

language.

## April 1

Statement from AMA President Dr. Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA (PDF) backing physician freedom to advocate for patient interests during the COVID-19 pandemic. Patient welfare should be the first priority in any situation where the interests of physicians and hospitals are in conflict. No employer should restrict physicians' freedom to advocate for the best interest of their patients.

## March 2020

### March 31

Statement from AMA President Dr. Patrice A Harris, MD, MA (PDF) supporting the health care workforce using their own personal protective equipment (PPE) if critical supplies cannot be provided to them due to a dire shortage.

Letter to Acting DEA Administrator Uttam Dhillon (PDF) asking that the DEA maintain a policy of rapid flexible annual production quota allocations for the duration of the declared national emergency so that supportive controlled substances (CII) which are used to ventilate patients safely and effectively do not become scarce.

### March 30

Statement from AMA President Patrice A Harris, MD, MA (PDF) applauding the administration's efforts to cut red tape and finding immediate solutions that increase capacity and ensure access to care in every patient setting. This includes addressing Medicare coverage for telephone visits, clarifying that remote monitoring can be used for acute conditions and greater telehealth coverage for emergency department visits.

Letter to President Trump (PDF) commending the decision to extend physical distancing guidelines and urging the administration to continue following the advice of leading health and science experts to give the health care workforce a fighting chance to stop the spread of the virus.

### March 28

Statement from AMA President Patrice Harris, MD, MA on PPE (PDF) urging federal coordination to ensure manufacturing facilities operate at maximum capacity and to create a

national tracking system for the acquisition and distribution of critical PPE supplies.

## March 27

Health care highlights of provisions secured in the "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act" (CARES Act) (PDF) offer physician practices access to the Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program, \$10 billion in emergency loans, limitation on liability for volunteer health care professionals and a \$100 billion fund to provide immediate relief by covering non-reimbursable expenses attributable to COVID-19.

## March 26

New CPT guidance (PDF) assists physicians and medical practices in properly reporting medical services provided to COVID-19 patients which serves to streamline communication across the health system.

## March 24

Encouraged the DoS and DHS to open visa processing (PDF) at embassies and consulates worldwide for physicians seeking to enter the U.S. to join residency programs in July 2020.  
Urged extensions and changes of status for foreign national doctors (PDF) currently in the U.S. be expedited so that the physician workforce can be expanded to meet the challenge of fighting COVID-19.  
AMA, AHA, ANA issued open letter (PDF) urging public to #StayHome to confront COVID-19.

## March 21

In a joint letter to the president (PDF), requested that the Defense Production Act (DPA) be used to increase the domestic production of medical supplies and equipment desperately needed for all front-line providers.

## March 20

Encouraged Congress (PDF) to include in the final "stimulus" legislation specific provisions to help physicians sustain their practices and provide their patients with the best possible care during the COVID-19 emergency.

## March 18

| Petitioned CMS Administrator Seema Verma (PDF) for CPT code clarification in light of COVID-19 with remote physiologic monitoring and telephone evaluation and management.

## March 19

| Asked Congress (PDF) to help preserve the viability of physician practices that are struggling to meet the needs of patients and staff as they confront revenue shortages through financial support, grants and interest free loans.

| Pressed Congress (PDF) to allocate financial assistance to front line health care personnel and providers, so that they can afford to take the necessary steps to respond to this pandemic.

## March 18

| In a joint letter told the federal government (PDF) what actions are needed to tackle PPE supply issues.

## March 16

| Asked for \$100 billion (PDF) for front line health care workers to preserve practices and allow them to continue providing care.

| Called on Vice President Mike Pence (PDF) for efforts to expand manufacturing and production of PPEs needed to ensure the health security of frontline personnel.

## March 13

| Urged HHS (PDF) to provide further clarity around testing criteria and priorities and to work quickly with community health stakeholders and physicians if the agency anticipates a shortage of PPE.

## March 12

| Sent a joint letter to Vice President Pence (PDF) requesting a national emergency be declared under the Stafford Act to help ensure availability of sufficient resources to properly respond to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.