

## July 31, 2020: Advocacy spotlight on Senate Republicans unveil details of fourth COVID-19 relief package

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### Senate Republicans unveil details of fourth COVID-19 relief package

Late on Monday, Senate Republicans released their version of the fourth COVID-19 relief package, known as the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools (HEALS) Act. A compilation of eight separate bills, the package addresses a broad range of issues such as restaurant worker support, reopening schools and medical supply chain problems. A few of the key health care issues addressed in the package include the following. Read the AMA's summary of the bill here.

- Extending repayment terms under the Medicare Accelerated and Advanced Payment Program, delaying the start of the repayment period from 120 to 270 days after receipt of funds and extending the length of the repayment period from 12 to 18 months.
- Increasing the Public Health Services Emergency Fund established by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act by \$25 billion.
- Creating an exclusive federal cause of action for coronavirus medical liability claims, under which health care providers would be liable only for coronavirus-related injuries caused by gross negligence or willful misconduct.
- Expanding access to the Paycheck Protection Program to 501(c)(6) entities, which would include many professional health associations such as state medical societies and national specialty societies, and other program improvements.
- Providing authority to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to extend waivers and other telehealth policies through 2021.
- Maintaining Medicare Part B beneficiary premiums at 2020 rates through 2021.
- Requiring all personal protective equipment purchases for the National Strategic Stockpile to come from domestic suppliers whenever possible; state stockpiles of medical products and supplies would be established and supported by a \$1 billion annual appropriation through 2030.
- Providing \$16 billion for testing, contact tracing and other COVID-19-related public health activities.

The total cost of the package is approximately \$1 trillion, about one-third of the amount that would be provided by the House-passed HEROES Act. This legislative package represents an initial offering by Senate Republican leadership. It will likely undergo significant revisions prior to debate on the Senate floor. Since various COVID-19 relief programs expired at the end of July, Congress faces pressure to send a final bipartisan package to the President for signature prior to adjourning for recess on Aug. 10. Congress must act now to protect patient access to care by preserving the viability of physician practices as part of the nation's essential health care system. Much has been done in the battle to curb the pandemic, but the catastrophic damage has taken an undeniable toll. Stimulus relief to date has helped, but is far from sufficient and every day that goes by without Congress passing a complete package and sending it to the President's desk is a stark reminder of how much more must be done to protect America's patients and those that are on the front lines taking care of them. Learn about the latest with COVID-19 legislation developments (PDF) Contact your federal legislators Participate in a virtual meeting with your legislators over the August recess

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