Nov. 20, 2020: Advocacy Update spotlight on Highlights from the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting

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The AMA House of Delegates convened virtually Nov. 13-17 to discuss and debate the most pressing health care issues currently facing the nation. Highlights of the meeting include:

Recognizing police brutality as structural racism: A new AMA policy recognizes police brutality as a manifestation of structural racism disproportionately impacting Black, Indigenous, and other people of color and directs the AMA to take steps to tackle policing reform and racial injustices.

Pushing for better access to opioid use disorder treatments: Delegates directed the AMA to advocate for the expansion of federal grants in support of treatment for a substance use disorder to states that are conditioned on that state's adoption of law or regulation that prohibit drug courts, recovery homes, sober houses, correctional settings and other similar programs from denying entry or ongoing care if a patient is receiving medication for an opioid use disorder or other chronic medical condition. Additionally, sustained funding should be supplied to states in support of evidence-based treatment for patients with a substance use disorder and/or co-occurring mental disorder.

Addressing drug shortages: In response to an uptick in national drug shortages that threaten patient care and safety, policy was adopted underscoring drug shortages as an urgent public health crisis. The move reinforces and builds upon existing AMA policy that outlines a comprehensive framework to address ongoing drug shortages which have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing social determinants of health: Policy was adopted to address social determinants of health as part of health insurance coverage. The disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need to address nonmedical, yet critical health needs and the underlying determinants of health—economic stability, neighborhoods, transportation, education and life opportunities, access to food, quality and safe housing, community/social support and access to health care. The new policies build on the AMA’s pursuit of greater health equity by identifying and eliminating inequities through advocacy, community leadership and education.

Covering more of the uninsured: The AMA voted to support public policy approaches that have the potential to expand insurance coverage to millions of the uninsured, including those who have lost their coverage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including auto-enrollment as a strategy to cover many
of the remaining uninsured who have coverage options available to them at no cost after any applicable subsidies.

Combating vaccine misinformation: Policy was adopted aimed at educating physicians on speaking with patients about COVID-19 vaccination. Under the new policy the AMA will help physicians address patient concerns, dispel misinformation and build confidence in COVID-19 vaccination.

Calling for COVID-19 prevention in congregate settings: In response to COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on individuals in congregate settings such as correctional and immigrant detention facilities, policy was adopted in support of improved public health measures to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and other contagious infectious diseases in those settings. The policy calls for all correctional and immigrant detention facilities to implement evidence-based COVID-19 prevention and control guidance, have adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits, sanitizing and disinfecting equipment and ensure humane, safe, quarantine protocols for anyone testing positive or exposed to SARS-CoV-2.

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