

5 big issues for physicians on Capitol Hill in 2021

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What's the news: Hundreds of physicians from across the country will be making virtual visits with their congressional representatives this week as part of the 2021 AMA National Advocacy Conference.

The key actions these physicians will be advocating include:

- Extending the moratorium on the Medicare sequester to prevent painful physician pay cuts.
- Eliminating Medicare's geographic restrictions on where telehealth may be used.
- Taking meaningful action to cut the country's maternal mortality rate.
- Supporting legitimate research to evaluate the potential efficacy and safety of medicines derived from cannabis.

The conference—being held online this year due to the pandemic—runs Feb. 23–24 and will feature updates from the Biden administration on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, perspectives from Congress, insights from the AMA's elected physician leaders, and a briefing from the AMA's senior advocacy staff. Register now.

Physicians also are being urged to talk with their congressional representatives about **expanding health care coverage**. While millions of Americans have gained coverage resulting from the Affordable Care Act (ACA), expanding access to and choice of affordable, quality health insurance coverage.

Now is the time to invest not only in fixing the law, but also in enhancing it. Improving the ACA appropriately targets providing coverage to the uninsured population, rather than upending the health insurance coverage of most Americans. Learn more about the AMA's plan to cover the uninsured in 2021 and beyond.

Why it's important: Members of Congress depend on subject-matter experts such as physicians and

medical students to create effective legislation that helps their constituents. Since there are few issues that affect constituents more intimately than health care, the need for physicians to explain and advocate for patient-centered policies is paramount.

On the **Medicare sequester**, physicians support bipartisan legislation to extend it, suspending the federal budget's 2% payment cuts to physicians through the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Physicians will urge their representatives to cosponsor H.R., 315, the "Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act" and ask their senators to introduce or support similar legislation in that chamber.

The U.S. has the highest **maternal mortality** rate among developed countries, with a large racial disparity in maternal deaths. To help change the trend, policymakers should—among other things—expand Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program coverage to 12 months post-partum, boost support for maternal mortality review committees, and improve data collection. Physicians will urge their congressional representatives to cosponsor the "Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness Act." Find out more about why inequities in maternal mortality must be attacked head on.

Telehealth services have emerged as a critical tool during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide care to patients while supporting physical distancing efforts and reducing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and other infectious diseases by avoiding unnecessary outpatient visits. Doctors will ask their congressional representatives to support eliminating restrictions on where telehealth technology may be used so Medicare may cover and pay for telehealth services to beneficiaries anywhere in the country and to any location. This should include removal of the geographic restriction and adding a provision to allow as an originating site any location at which a patient is located.

On **medical cannabis**, the AMA believes that scientifically valid and well-controlled clinical trials conducted under federal investigational new drug applications are necessary to assess the safety and effectiveness of all new drugs, including potential cannabis products for medical use. Physicians will urge their senators to cosponsor S. 253, "Cannabidiol and Marijuana Research Expansion Act" to enable medical marijuana research. This legislation passed the Senate with unanimous support in December 2020, but did not pass in the House of Representatives prior to the end of the 116th Congress.

Learn more: Stay up to date on the AMA's advocacy efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic on other vital issues, such as financial relief, personal protective equipment, testing, health equity and more.

The AMA's "Congressional Check-Up: A Guide to Physician Advocacy" offers insightful advice on how doctors can effectively engage with lawmakers on behalf of their patients and colleagues.