

Feb. 26, 2021: Advocacy Update spotlight on the top issues from the AMA National Advocacy Conference

Top issues from the AMA National Advocacy Conference

This year's AMA National Advocacy Conference was virtual, but its goal was more important than ever, as we mark the heartbreaking milestone of 500,000 COVID-19 deaths: to press at the federal level for improving health care.

What history can tell us about today's challenges



Doris Kearns Goodwin

World-renowned presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin began the conference in conversation with AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, where they discussed what history can tell us about how to face our society's current challenges. Kearns Goodwin noted not since the Great Depression has the U.S. seen this level of trauma that affects everyone's everyday lives. Recounting stories and lessons from that time, as well as the Civil War and World Wars I-II, Kearns Goodwin suggested strong leadership was key to weathering—and bettering—ourselves through these times of crisis. The common threads of good leadership, she stated, are humility, empathy, resilience, ambition and trust. That theme carried through the rest of the conference, as speakers and attendees considered the best strategies for moving health care forward.

100 million shots in 100 days



Bechara Choucair, MD

COVID-19 vaccines were next on the agenda, where Bechara Choucair, MD, vaccinations coordinator, White House COVID Response Team, discussed President Biden's goal of administering 100 million shots in his first 100 days in office. Dr. Choucair discussed the Administration's plans to increase: vaccination supply, the number of vaccinators and places for vaccination—while working with physician and other provider groups on vaccine rollout. Also top of mind for the Administration is equitable distribution of vaccines, which Dr. Choucair said would be advanced by the President's Jan. 21 "Executive Order on Ensuring an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery."

Top advocacy issues

CBS News' Margaret Brennan moderated the next two panels—discussions with AMA leadership and

senior AMA advocacy staff—about the issues they address daily when discussing the AMA’s efforts and advocacy agenda with members of Congress, the Administration and the media. The panelists also provided guidance on addressing these issues with members of Congress, and encouraged advocates to use the AMA’s action kit in their virtual Hill visits with lawmakers—covering Medicare sequestration relief, telehealth expansion, maternal health and medical marijuana research.

Congressional perspectives

A number of lawmakers joined the conference to provide their takes on the health care issues atop everyone’s minds—particularly COVID-19 vaccines, equity and related issues. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), a former small business owner, discussed the challenges faced by small physician practices in rural and underserved areas. She said the Medicare Advance and Accelerated Payments and other programs have been helpful, but more work is needed to ensure practice sustainability—including extending the moratorium on the 2% Medicare sequestration cuts currently scheduled to go into effect April 1—a top AMA priority. Rep. Brad Schneider (D-10th IL) also expressed the need to prevent across-the-board Medicare sequester cuts and touted his AMA-supported legislation to address the issue.



Rep. Sewell (L); Rep. Bera, MD (R)

The expansion of telehealth has been a game-changer, cited by most of the Congressional speakers during the conference—and should be here to stay even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Rep. Terri Sewell (D-7th AL) grew up in the rural part of her district in Alabama and has seen how people need access to care via telehealth. And it is not just the health care technology that is needed—she said, “I believe broadband is the telephone of this century. It’s critical, necessary infrastructure and we must invest in it.” Sen. Shaheen, Rep. Larry Bucshon, MD (R-8th IN) and Rep. Lucy McBath (D-6th GA) echoed the call for telehealth expansion.

Vaccine hesitancy is another critical topic addressed at the conference by Ami Bera, MD (D-7th CA) and Rep. Sewell. Dr. Bera noted there are two trusted sources of health care information in many underserved communities—particularly in Black communities: their own physicians and their clergy. He emphasized the need to get tools, resources and—in the case of physicians, vaccines—into their hands so they can talk with their communities and offer the information needed to assuage vaccine hesitation.



Rep. Lucy McBath (D-6th GA)

Rep. McBath discussed the importance of addressing maternal mortality for Black women in particular, and how we can improve public health infrastructure by appropriating more money to strengthen public health data systems, among other measures.

Learn more about the AMA National Advocacy Conference, and save the date for next year’s conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 14-16, 2022.

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