COVID-19 vaccine distribution has not gone as smoothly as we all would like. With health systems and physician practices across the country expressing their frustrations, the message is clear: More vaccines are needed to meet the growing demand.

COVID-19 vaccine rollout and distribution was discussed at the inaugural AMA Insight Network virtual meeting. The network aims to help AMA Health System Partner Program members save time and money, gain early access to innovative ideas, get feedback from their peers, network, and learn about pilot opportunities. Learn more.

“These meetings are meant to bring together AMA subject-matter experts and health care leaders from around the country to share insights, best practices and also address questions or challenges that many are sharing on key issues,” said James Gilligan, AMA vice president of health systems and group partnership. The network’s meetings may be held up to 10 times a year and will cover a variety of topics such as satisfaction and sustainability, health equity, advocacy and chronic disease prevention.

Sharing vaccine distribution needs

“Our team keeps a close eye on trends in health care that are relevant to our group partners,” said Gilligan. Additionally, with several health system leaders reaching out about key vaccine questions, it led “to the topic of planning and executing on strategies to distribute vaccines quickly and effectively to your communities.”

“We’ve been hearing from physician offices that they’re not able to get the vaccines with the amount that they would like to be able to get,” said Margaret Garikes, AMA vice president of federal affairs.

Focusing on COVID-19 vaccination rollout and distribution, the AMA Insight Network meeting in February featured presentations from physician leaders at Hattiesburg Clinic, Marshfield Clinic Health...
They all reported a similar problem: The supply of vaccines they are receiving is far below their capacity to administer them to eligible patients. The average weekly vaccine allotment from their individual states is only 20% as much as they could administer if they got more doses. The physician leaders attending said that states should look more to health systems already equipped to operationalize distribution.

Find out more about these health systems and others are moving medicine at the AMA partner spotlight page.

During the meeting, Garikes also shared the AMA’s recent and ongoing COVID-19 advocacy efforts to help health systems and physician practices.

**Expanding telehealth**

The AMA has “spent a lot of time working on telehealth and including audio payments only as well,” said Garikes. “There was a great expansion in that realm, and we’re continuing to work on that—both with what’s going on with CMS [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services], but also my colleagues on the congressional side of the equation are continuing to work on that in terms of geographic and site restrictions.”

**Improving access to supplies**

There has been ongoing concern “about testing, especially in the hospital and academic lab area,” said Garikes, adding that “we were very concerned about the hospital and academic folks being able to get the information that they needed at the appropriate time.”

The AMA has spoken with President Joe Biden’s team “about transparency and improving communication,” she said. This led “into the conversations that we’ve been having in terms of PPE and shortages, the continued communication around that and the need for transparency.”

**Enhancing data collection**

Throughout the pandemic, “data collection has been an issue,” said Garikes. But the AMA
has “been talking to the administration as well as others in terms of the importance of collecting race and ethnicity data, and we will continue to do so.”

**Addressing vaccine hesitancy**

There have been many discussions around vaccine hesitancy and the AMA continues to educate physicians through a series of efforts such as webinars.

“We were hearing back in August and September about vaccine hesitancy among physicians,” said Garikes, adding that “that has dissipated quite a bit and, gratefully, we think that's addressed, but we are trying to provide additional resources in terms of what's needed for physicians to provide to their patients.”

The AMA offers a COVID-19 vaccines guide for physicians to help build trust in vaccine safety and efficacy. This guide contains background and actions, evidence-based messaging guidance and best practices for consideration in external communications on COVID-19 vaccine topics.

Learn more about how the AMA is helping health systems face 2021’s biggest challenges.