

# How pandemic brought health policy questions into sharper focus

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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the health policy issues arising during the global struggles against the highly transmissible SARS-CoV-2, the JAMA Network™ has transitioned its *JAMA Health Forum™* channel to a peer-reviewed journal.

The open-access, online journal focuses on health policy, health care systems, and global and public health and was started as a JAMA Network channel in January 2020, with plans to transition to a peer-reviewed journal in the spring of 2021. The editor of *JAMA Health Forum* is John Z. Ayanian, MD, MPP, of the University of Michigan Medical School, and the deputy editor is Melinda B. Buntin, PhD, of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

As a JAMA Network channel, the website was designed to gather health policy articles and multimedia, including podcasts and videos, from across the JAMA Network on a single website and feature brief assessments written by Dr. Ayanian, Buntin and others. Additional expert commentary was sought on current events, important developments and controversial issues related to health policy.

## COVID-19 creates new demand

But a few weeks after its launch as a health policy channel last year, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, creating an increased demand for new information and discussion about health issues and policies, particularly related to COVID-19, according to Dr. Ayanian.

“Our volume of submissions increased substantially, and the urgency of those submissions for health systems, health agencies and front-line physicians and clinicians became much more important, so it was exciting for us to serve as editors of this new channel to bring the best content forward,” he said.

As a peer-reviewed journal, *JAMA Health Forum* is publishing new research as well as commentary and analysis, he said. The journal started receiving research manuscript submissions in January 2021 and published its first peer-reviewed issue in May.

Published commentaries continue to be sophisticated and offer original contributions to the understanding of contemporary health policy issues, Buntin said. “They come from people who are leaders in the field. They come from people whose opinions you want to read,” she said.

The journal also strives for diversity of viewpoint.

“We are a policy journal, so we have people from different parts of the political spectrum that are publishing in our pages. We also have people who come from different backgrounds who are publishing in our pages—and we are proud of that,” Buntin said.

Read this editorial that Buntin and Dr. Ayanian co-wrote, “The Debut of *JAMA Health Forum* as a Peer-Reviewed Journal.”

Examples of outstanding research published so far include:

- “Time and Financial Costs for Physician Practices to Participate in the Medicare Merit-based Incentive Payment System: A Qualitative Study.”
- “Association of Physician Group Practice Participation in Bundled Payments with Patient Selection, Costs, and Outcomes for Joint Replacement.”
- “Associations Between a New York City Paid Sick Leave Mandate and Health Care Utilization Among Medicaid Beneficiaries in New York City and New York State.”

## Health policy matters

“Health policy permeates every aspect of health care in the United States and many other countries,” Dr. Ayanian said. “There are important policy issues in how we pay for care, how we organize it, how it is delivered, how we measure the quality and equity of care. For physicians who are striving to deliver the best possible care to their patients, those are critical issues.”

Health equity is a particularly important issue for the new publication, “made more apparent and prominent by COVID-19,” Dr. Ayanian explained. “The disparities in health outcomes that were long present in U.S. society became immediately apparent to many people who may have been less familiar with them prior to COVID-19.”

“The disproportionate burden of chronic illnesses and socioeconomic differences, including disparities in insurance coverage, in many cases are forms of structural racism that contribute to the racial and

ethnic disparities in health outcomes,” he said.

Physicians can look forward to the publication of research in areas such as health services research, which examines the quality, costs and equity of care provided to patients and communities; health economics; biostatistics, outcomes research and implementation research.

“Each of those fields have become more rigorous in the past 20 years,” Dr. Ayanian said.

Buntin said the editors work to vet the submissions to help ensure physician readers are reading research that lives up to JAMA Network’s reputation.