

ICYMI: 10 stories to read from the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting

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Nearly 700 physicians, residents and medical students gathered in Chicago for the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting to consider a wide array of proposals to help fulfill the AMA's core mission of promoting medicine and improving public health.

The occasion marked the first time that the AMA House of Delegates met in person since the emergence of COVID-19, and the physicians did so following a strict health-and-safety protocol.

The meeting also was the stage for the full unveiling of the AMA Recovery Plan for America's Physicians, which is rebuilding critical components of the profession by:

- Fixing prior authorization.
- Leading the charge to reform Medicare pay.
- Fighting scope creep.
- Supporting telehealth.
- Reducing physician burnout.

A medical future full of hope, not fear

Moments after being inaugurated as the AMA's 177th president, Jack Resneck Jr., MD, peered out at the House of Medicine. A climactic moment in and of itself, this one was of added significance, with Dr. Resneck being the first president to deliver the inaugural address to fellow delegates in person in three years.

The once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that prevented the ceremony in 2020 and 2021 remains deadly and is still a major focus of the AMA's work. Dr. Resneck laid out the immense COVID-19-related challenges that made for an uphill battle for physicians—a fight that is still ongoing.

“While it would be easy to get overwhelmed by despair, as I begin this new role, I’ve never been prouder of my physician colleagues. I’ve never been prouder to be part of this profession,” Dr. Resneck said. “And I’ve never been prouder of our AMA.”

Watch or read Dr. Resneck’s speech to learn why he believes physicians must be guided by hope, not fear.

In his speech at the opening session of the Annual Meeting, AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, said that as the AMA celebrates its 175th anniversary this year it retains its role as the vanguard of creating a healthier nation.

Watch or read Dr. Madara’s speech to find out how the AMA is pursuing work worthy of its 175-year legacy.

10 things to catch up on

The AMA’s policymaking meetings may seem to start slowly, with days of thoughtful, detailed reference-committee testimony, but they conclude with a flurry of votes and AMA news releases. Even die-hard physician advocates can have trouble keeping pace.

In case you missed it, here are 10 stories worth revisiting from the Annual Meeting—in no particular order.

1 U.S. must renew commitment to physicians

Since the last time delegates gathered in person in 2019, there have been stimulus checks, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, along with several other COVID-19 related relief efforts sent from Washington. Now the AMA has developed its own plan to help physicians and their practices recover from the hardships of the pandemic.

“It’s physicians who are rising to this moment—day after day,” AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD, said in his address at the opening session in which he detailed the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians.

“It’s physicians our nation turns to—for answers, for treatment, for help,” said Dr. Harmon, a family physician in South Carolina. “You’ve taken care of our nation—at great personal

sacrifice—and it’s time our nation renews its commitment to you.” (Watch or read Dr. Harmon’s speech.)

2

AMA details plan to stop the public health “infodemic”

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation has been of the utmost concern. This has led to what some describe as a secondary “infodemic,” where permanent harm may be done to the trust in institutions due to the sheer volume of disinformation spread in a rapidly changing and sensitive environment, says an AMA Board of Trustees report adopted at the Annual Meeting.

“We must ensure that health professionals spreading disinformation aren’t able to use far-reaching platforms, often benefitting them financially, to disseminate dangerous health claims,” Dr. Harmon said. “While we are unlikely to undo the harms caused by disinformation campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic, we can act now to help prevent the spread of disinformation in the future.”

3

With abortion under attack, doctors push back on criminalizing care

Responding to the growing threat of overpolicing and surveillance of reproductive health services, delegates adopted policy recognizing that it is a violation of human rights when government intrudes into medicine and impedes access to safe, evidence-based reproductive health services, including abortion and contraception.

The AMA will seek expanded legal protections for patients and physicians against government systems of control and punishment that criminalize reproductive health services.

“A growing number of current and pending laws insert government into the patient-physician relationship by dictating limits or bans on reproductive health services and while also aiming to criminally punish patients for their health decisions,” said Dr. Resneck.

“The new policy also calls for AMA to seek legal protections for patients who cross state lines to receive reproductive health services, as well as legal protections for physicians and others who support or provide reproductive health services or referrals to patients who cross state lines.”

4

Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH, wins office of AMA president-elect

Dr. Ehrenfeld, an anesthesiologist in Wisconsin, was voted president-elect on June 14 by the physicians and medical students gathered at the Annual Meeting.

“I am honored to be elected by my peers to represent the nation’s physicians and the patients we serve,” said Dr. Ehrenfeld. “It is a pivotal and challenging time for medicine, physicians and our health system, and as president-elect, I am committed to advancing the AMA’s immediate goals around the Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians, as well as the longer-term advocacy efforts aimed at shaping the future of medicine and improving the health of the nation.”

Following a yearlong term as president-elect, Dr. Ehrenfeld will be installed as AMA president in June 2023. Dr. Ehrenfeld is the first openly gay person to hold the office of president-elect, and also will be the first as AMA president. Read about the other winners of the 2022 AMA elections.

5

Is that “resident” or “attending” a doctor? Not always, AMA warns

Terms such as “resident,” “fellow” and “attending” represent a historical role for physicians within the world of medicine. But in recent years, physician assistant and nursing programs have begun using similar terminology, which may be confusing to patients.

“There is potential confusion for the public in the use of terms describing the training program and level of training that health care professionals enroll in or complete,” says a report whose recommendations were adopted by delegates.

“A standardization and understanding of terms for physicians and nonphysicians will be beneficial to the public and health care professionals,” says the AMA Council on Medical Education report.

6

Find new ways to help medical students, residents get child care

The House of Delegates adopted policy to address the cost of child care for cash-strapped and busy medical students, residents and fellows.

“Many physicians-in-training may become parents during their medical training, a time when their pay is low or non-existent and they’re working highly unconventional hours,” Dr.

Ehrenfeld said. “We believe providing on-site or subsidized child care to medical students and residents during their training will help alleviate some of the financial burden they face and offer the best possible solution to their family’s child care needs.”

Read more about the AMA's new policy on access to child care for medical students and residents, as well as delegates' action on parental leave for medical students.

7

“Enough is enough”: AMA takes more steps to prevent gun violence

The House of Delegates declared firearm violence a public health crisis at the 2016 Annual Meeting, which convened in the aftermath of the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando where 49 people were killed.

The 2022 AMA Annual Meeting was preceded by mass shootings at a school in Uvalde, Texas, and a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, and delegates adopted new policy to support regulating homemade weapons known as “ghost guns,” research warning labels on ammunition packages, and considering the mental health of schoolchildren as they engage in active-shooter drills.

“This cannot be our new normal,” Dr. Harmon said in special remarks delivered at this meeting’s opening session. “Gun violence is out of control. Enough is enough.”

8

Stop insurance coverage losses when public health emergency ends

There are steps that states can take to streamline enrollment and eligibility, help facilitate coverage transitions, and invest in outreach and enrollment assistance to prevent coverage losses once the COVID-19 public health emergency expires.

Federal and state entities should monitor these policies to ensure successful enrollment and retention, and transitions for those no longer eligible for Medicaid to other quality affordable coverage, according to a report whose recommendations were adopted at the Annual Meeting.

“We are concerned that once the public health emergency ends, state eligibility redeterminations will result in more patients becoming uninsured,” said AMA Trustee Willie Underwood III, MD, MSc, MPH. “We hope that states will employ strategies to help Medicaid-eligible patients keep their coverage and transition those no longer eligible into

other affordable health plans.”

9

Help private practices build their part in new payment models

The AMA and other medical associations can do their part to guide physicians, including independent private practice physicians, to take part in prospective payment models. New policy offers guidance on collaborating with other physician practices while maintaining autonomy, reducing administrative burdens and improving quality metrics. Interest in value-based or alternative payment models has gained traction over the last 10 years among public and private payers concerned about rising health care costs and quality outcomes.

“Appropriately funded prospective payment models offer one solution to provide potential stability and predictability of payment for some practices when demand for services decreases,” says the AMA Council on Medical Service report whose recommendations were adopted by delegates.

10

AMA: Low-wage work exacerbates health inequities

One in 10 Americans lives in poverty. Most are employed, but still struggle to afford the necessities to stay healthy. Social determinants of health—which include education, housing, wealth, income and employment—“are impacted by larger, powerful systems that lead to discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, exclusion and isolation,” according to a report whose recommendations were adopted at the Annual Meeting.

“Simply put, decreasing poverty improves health,” said AMA Trustee David H. Aizuss, MD. “The COVID-19 pandemic created a concurrent public health and economic crisis that exposed and exacerbated access to care and other social inequities.

“Not only has the pandemic disproportionately impacted minoritized and marginalized communities, but economic insecurity, housing insecurity and food insecurity have disproportionately burdened communities of color and other historically marginalized populations—all highlighting in stark relief the fact that people with low incomes have worse health outcomes,” said Dr. Aizuss, a board-certified ophthalmologist living in Calabasas, California.

“Too many people are working full-time jobs—sometimes more than one job—and are unable to rise above poverty wages,” Dr. Aizuss added. “That must change.”

In other action, AMA delegates took steps to:

- Demand action on the public health crisis of climate change.
- Educate doctors and the public on the new 988 mental health hotline.
- Boost training on laboratory testing in medical schools.
- Track well-being efforts at medical schools and residency programs.
- Allow natural hairstyles and cultural headwear in health care settings.

To catch up with these items and other news from the House of Delegates' gathering in the Windy City, read our highlights from the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting.