The COVID-19 pandemic's onset was a stark reminder of how immediate pressures can push aside carefully plotted agendas, but that should not mean losing sight of long-term needs.

That message was delivered by AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, during his speech at the opening session of the 2022 AMA Interim Meeting in Honolulu.

Dr. Madara reflected on the AMA’s 175th anniversary earlier this year during his address at the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago. In Honolulu, he remarked on another milestone: the 10-year anniversary of the AMA’s long-term strategic plan. (Read Dr. Madara’s speech.)

The plan was developed with two main goals in mind—that the actions of the AMA more strongly reflect the organization’s mission, and that those actions have a strong, positive impact.

This led to a three-pronged strategy aimed at confronting chronic disease, driving professional development and removing obstacles that interfere with patient care.

Heart of the matter

Chronic disease is a “public health crisis that consumes 90% of our nation’s health costs,” Dr. Madara said, describing how the AMA partners with other organizations to support physicians in helping patients at high risk for heart disease better manage their blood pressure.

“Hypertension being the No. 1 cause of death and disability in our nation makes it an obvious place to start,” the AMA’s CEO said.

With the American Heart Association, the AMA recently recognized more than 1,300 health care organizations that have helped 8 million people with hypertension improve their heart health.
Work on this issue corresponds with the AMA’s work to advance health equity, Dr. Madara said.

“Chronic disease, such as hypertension, disproportionately affects those from historically disinvested and minoritized communities,” Dr. Madara said. “Our work on hypertension is enhanced by our broad efforts to advance racial justice in medicine and eliminate health inequities—work led by the AMA Center for Health Equity.”

The AMA’s effort to drive the future of medicine by transforming medical education initially focused on the undergraduate level, expanding to a consortium of 37 medical schools and creating the “third science of medical education”—health systems science.

“We now have an additional consortium of 11 integrated health systems focused on reimagining residency with the singular goal of optimizing the transition from med school to residency and residency to practice,” Dr. Madara noted.

In addition, the AMA Ed Hub™, which launched in 2019, already offers more than 9,000 online educational resources.

**Serving physicians**

The focus on removing obstacles to care has flowed into the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians, which includes fixing prior authorization and reducing physician burnout as critical components.

That work also includes the founding of Health2047, the AMA’s Silicon Valley-based enterprise. Health2047 develops new companies that use innovative approaches to improve the physician environment.

Emergence, for example, is a company that supports practices’ back office and organizational needs. SiteBridge, meanwhile, facilitates the participation of smaller practices in clinical trials and helps researchers obtain real world data from diverse sources.

“Importantly, the model here is of the company working for and serving physicians, not the other way around,” Dr. Madara said.
Realizing tomorrow’s promise

“We’ve traveled far in the last 10 years,” Dr. Madara said, adding that physicians need a practice environment that better supports their efforts in patient care, training that prepares them to practice 21st-century medicine, and the tools to handle the “tsunami of chronic disease now cascading on physician offices.”

“I don’t know what our health system will look like in 10 years, let alone by mid-century,” he added. “But I do know that … if we don’t do these three things—on which our strategic framework focuses—then our health care system, regardless of its structure, will function even worse than it does today.

“It will be up to physician leadership, to all of us, to realize the promise of this work, which—in the most basic and fundamental of ways—promotes the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health.”