October 5, 2020

The MMS will continue to monitor developments related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and the response by state and federal agencies. For current information, including updates from NEJM, visit the dedicated page on the MMS website: massmed.org/covid-19.

Public Health

Exploring the disproportionate impact on the Latinx community

In recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, the American Medical Association and health experts discuss the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Latinx community, the impact of the public charge rule, patients' fears, and their lack of access to technology. Watch now »

Hypertension, obesity, and COVID-19

New data show unfavorable U.S. trends in hypertension and obesity, with communities of color doing worse. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases Director Griffin P. Rodgers, MD, and National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Director Gary H. Gibbons, MD, discuss the implications for COVID-19 outcomes and public health. Listen now »
Practice Management

Additional federal funding for physicians – Applications open Oct. 5

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced on Thursday that it will disburse another $20 billion in CARES Act Provider Relief Funds. Under the Phase 3 General Distribution allocation, physicians who already received Provider Relief Fund payments may apply for additional funding that considers financial losses and changes in operating expenses caused by novel coronavirus.

Recognizing the nationwide surge in anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of behavioral health providers to continue care through telehealth and other means, HHS will widen funding eligibility to include psychiatrists and other behavioral health care providers.

Previously ineligible physicians, such as those who began practicing in 2020, will also be eligible to apply. Physicians can apply starting October 5, 2020 through November 6, 2020 for Phase 3 General Distribution funding. This General Distribution is in line with the MMS’ advocacy on the Provider Relief Fund, as additional financial relief for physicians continues to be a top MMS priority.

Legislation extends federal government health programs and AAP loan recoupment

Last week, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) to avoid a government shutdown. The bipartisan CR contains funding for all federal agencies through December 11, 2020, some relief for providers who received Accelerated and Advanced Payment (AAP) loans, and funding for several Medicare, Medicaid, and public healthcare programs (known as “healthcare extenders”).

Specifically, the resolution lengthens the recoupment period for AAP loans to one year (an increase from the current recoupment period of four months after initial payment) and
reduces the offset amount to 25% for the first 11 months, 50% for the next six months, with 29 months to repay the balance in full. It also reduces the interest rate on unpaid balances from nearly 10% to 4%.

The CR also funds the healthcare extenders through December 11, including community health centers, teaching health centers that operate graduate medical education programs, the National Health Service Corps, Special Diabetes Programs, Money Follows the Person demonstration, the community mental health services demonstration program, and the disproportionate share hospital payment reduction delay that was previously set to sunset on November 30, 2020. The legislation also provides clarification that drugs used in medication-assisted treatment can continue to get Medicaid rebates and provides an increase in funding for the Medicaid improvement fund, protection of Medicare beneficiaries from an expected Part B premium hike, and extension of FDA’s rare pediatric disease priority review voucher program.

SBA guidelines for changes of ownership of PPP borrowers

The U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) released a procedural notice explaining the required procedure for changes of ownership of an entity that has received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds—a "PPP borrower." Any PPP borrower looking at a potential change in control needs to be familiar with this guidance. Also, anyone looking to acquire control of a PPP borrower should review the notice.

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care: Vaccine critical for the upcoming season

Harvard Pilgrim supports annual influenza immunization efforts by covering flu vaccines at retail pharmacies for a $0 cost share for members age 19 years and older on our Commercial formularies (Premium, Value, and Core NH). Flu vaccines are covered as a Preventative Care Benefit for adults under the Affordable Care Act. For members ages 0 to 18 years, flu vaccines are provided by the state for in-office administration. Certain age restrictions for specific flu vaccines may apply based on product labeling. For Medicare
Advantage members, flu vaccines are covered at $0 cost share (billed under Part B) at retail pharmacies or in doctor’s offices.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website provides valuable information about vaccination, infection control, prevention, treatment, and diagnosis of seasonal influenza on the [Information for Health Professionals](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/health-professionals) and [Influenza ACIP Vaccine Recommendations](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/index.html) pages. In addition, we recommend that you and/or your office staff refer to the following resources to support physical distancing in your practice while you bring patients back:

- [CDC Guidance on Immunizations During a Pandemic](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/health-professionals/immunization-guidance/pandemic.html)
- [CDC Print Resources to Post in Your Office](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/immunization-awareness/monthly/2021/immunization-awareness-month-2021-posters.html)
- [Infectious Diseases Society of America COVID-19 poster](https://www.idsociety.org/covid-posters/)

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**DOI and CHIA meeting for providers: testing, telehealth, and prior authorization**

The Division of Insurance (DOI) and the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) hosts regular meetings to offer providers an opportunity to raise questions and concerns related to Governor Baker’s emergency order commercial insurance provisions. The next meeting will focus on testing, telehealth, and prior authorization, and will be recorded for later viewing. The DOI and CHIA, along with the Massachusetts Medical Society and the Massachusetts Hospital Association, sponsor these calls.

- Date: Thursday, October 29
- Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EST
- Meeting ID: 290 289 5643
- Passcode: 501
- [Meeting URL »](https://doi.mass.gov/facilities/meeting-poster.html)

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