March 29, 2021

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.

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Public Health

Massachusetts Homebound Vaccination Program

For people who cannot leave their home for a vaccine appointment, even with assistance, the Commonwealth has developed a multi-pronged solution to ensure these individuals are able to get vaccinated in their home.

Many local boards of health are managing their own homebound vaccination programs for their community, while others have chosen to partner with the state’s homebound vaccination program through Commonwealth Care Alliance (CCA).

For more information, click here.

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Practice Management
COVID-19 questions and answers for people who have Substance Use Disorder

People who use drugs may also have underlying medical conditions that put them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. The CDC’s COVID-19 Questions and Answers: For People Who Use Drugs or Have Substance Use Disorder addresses concerns and questions related to their risk. Additionally, recent data and reports show that fatal drug overdoses in the United States have been increasing before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation and the CDC will provide updated information as it becomes available.

Forgone care during the pandemic

According to a recent Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) survey, many Medicare beneficiaries reported forgoing non-COVID-19 care such as regular check-ups or medical screening tests due to the pandemic. A recent CMS data analysis also showed a significant decline in service use for Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) beneficiaries, particularly for mental health and substance use disorders. With that, the number of services delivered via telehealth has significantly increased during the public health emergency.

As COVID-19 vaccines are becoming more readily available, CMS is encouraging beneficiaries to contact their health care professionals to discuss getting vaccinated, schedule any missed appointments and discuss other healthcare needs, including preventive care, screenings, and mental health services, as well as utilize telehealth services when appropriate.

SBA to increase lending limit for COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans
The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is increasing the maximum amount small businesses and non-profit organizations can borrow through its COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. Starting the week of April 6, 2021, the SBA is raising the loan limit for the COVID-19 EIDL program from 6-months of economic injury with a maximum loan amount of $150,000 to up to 24-months of economic injury with a maximum loan amount of $500,000.

Businesses that receive a loan subject to the current limits do not need to submit a request for an increase at this time. SBA will reach out directly via email and provide more details about how businesses can request an increase closer to the April 6 implementation date. Any new loan applications and any loans in process when the new loan limits are implemented will automatically be considered for loans covering 24 months of economic injury up to a maximum of $500,000. Read more here.

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DOI and MassHealth listening sessions on telehealth provisions (evening session added)

The Massachusetts Division of Insurance (DOI) and MassHealth are scheduling information sessions (see schedule below) to discuss the implementation of telehealth provisions in Chapter 260 of the Acts of 2020 as enacted on January 1, 2021.

During these information sessions, DOI and MassHealth are interested in having conversations with physicians, consumers, insurance carriers, and other stakeholders to hear thoughts about guidance that the Division of Insurance and MassHealth might provide through the issuing of bulletins, regulations, or other communications to allow for the implementation of the noted provisions.

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) will be actively engaged in each of these sessions, advocating on behalf of the physician community. If you have specifics consistent with the identified topic areas listed below, please contact Leda Anderson at Landerson@mms.org or Bissan Biary at BBiary@mms.org.

**DOI listening sessions schedule**
• Wednesday, March 31, 10 a.m. - 11:30; Planned topics: Reimbursement and billing

• Wednesday, April 14, 10 a.m. - 11:30; Planned topics: Utilization review for telehealth and telehealth standards to be added to managed care accreditation reviews

• Thursday, April 29, 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.; This session has been added and is being especially offered by the DOI for physicians and other providers unable to attend previous daytime calls. Topics can include those previously covered and other issues as necessary: communicating coverage to patients; definition of primary care, behavioral health, chronic disease management; reimbursement and coding; appropriateness and utilization management.

To join the Zoom meetings, click here.

• Meeting ID: 290 289 5643

• Passcode: 501

Join via telephone:

• (646)-558-8656 (ET)

• (646)-518-9805 (ET)