



Dear ENT Advocacy Network Member:

April 14, 2020

Legislative and political activity directly affects our practices and our patients. As a leading advocate for otolaryngology-head and neck surgery, we hope you enjoy reading this edition of *The ENT Advocate*, your premier source of advocacy information for the specialty!

Lead Story

Congress Takes Action to Pass Three Coronavirus Bills

During the month of March, the Academy's Advocacy team urged Congress to help otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons grappling with impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their patients and their practices. Congress passed, and President Trump signed into law, three separate pieces of legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 6, 2020, the first Coronavirus legislative package, "[The Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act 2020](#)," was enacted into law. This legislation provided \$8.3 billion in emergency funding for federal agencies to immediately respond to the outbreak. Then, on March 18, 2020, the President signed, "[The Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#)," which focused on paid sick leave, tax credits, free COVID-19 testing, as well as expanding food assistance programs, increasing Medicaid funding, and unemployment assistance. Lastly, on March 27, 2020, President Trump signed "[The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#)," into law. The CARES Act provides emergency relief to individuals and businesses during the COVID-19 crisis. The Act includes \$2.2 trillion in aid for small businesses, providers, and funding to build up the Strategic National Stockpile to increase availability of equipment, including ventilators and masks. The Academy's Advocacy team will continue to advocate on behalf the specialty as Congress debates a fourth legislative package to address the pandemic.

Legislative & Political Reports

AAO-HNS Signs Coalition Letter on CARES Act Emergency Funding

On April 7, the AAO-HNS joined scores of groups across the House of Medicine in [sending a letter to U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services \(HHS\) Alex Azar](#) regarding immediate financial relief for physician practices. The coalition urged HHS to provide one month of revenue to each physician (MD or DO) enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid to account for financial losses and non-reimbursable expenses resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. This funding was included in the CARES Act, which authorized \$100 billion in direct financial support for healthcare providers.

CMS Expands Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Program

Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Medicare providers can now access emergency funds to help ease financial burdens caused by COVID-19. [The Accelerated and Advance Payment Program](#) applies to Medicare enrolled physicians, though providers must meet several conditions to qualify for advance payments. In a little over a week, CMS delivered more than \$51 billion to the healthcare providers on the frontlines battling the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) to ensure they have the resources they need to combat this pandemic. CMS approved over 21,000 of 32,000 requests received.

AAO-HNS Advocates to Support Physician Practice Stability

AAO-HNS joined 22 surgical societies in [sending a March 24 letter](#) in support of S. 3559, “The Immediate Relief for Rural Facilities and Providers Act,” to help relieve the current strain on physician practices being caused by COVID-19. The Academy asked that the language in S. 3559 be included in the CARES Act, in order to provide integral financial support to physician businesses during this unprecedented time.

CMS Extends Deadline for Quality Reporting 2019 Performance Year Data

On March 22, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [announced immediate exceptions and extensions for 2019 reporting requirements under the Quality Payment Program](#). The 2019 data submission deadline has been extended by 30 days, from March 31 to April 30. Eligible clinicians (ECs) who have already submitted Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) data, or who choose to submit MIPS data by April 30, will be scored and receive a MIPS payment adjustment based on the data submitted. ECs who have not submitted any data by April 30 will qualify for the automatic extreme and uncontrollable circumstances policy and will receive a neutral payment adjustment for the 2021 MIPS payment year. Reg-entSM participants reporting MIPS 2019 data through the registry should contact reg-ent@entnet.org for more information regarding your submission to CMS.

AAO-HNS Advocates for Financial Relief for Members in CARES Stimulus Package

The Academy, and our partners in the Surgical Coalition, [sent a letter to Congressional leadership on March 19](#) advocating that Congress address the following elements in the third Coronavirus relief package: Ensure physicians have the equipment they need, ensure Good Samaritans are protected when crossing state lines, prevent frivolous lawsuits for telehealth, fund military-civilian partnerships, temporarily allow physician-owned hospital expansion, relieve unnecessary prior authorization, provide small business relief for physician practices, ensure physicians have the disability protections that they need, and allow loss forgiveness for the bundled payment for care improvements initiative. The letter also advocated for suspension of the following elements: budget neutrality, sequestration, MACRA reporting requirements, and medical student loan repayment.

CMS Issues Updated Recommendations on Non-Emergent, Elective Medical Services and Treatment

On April 6, [CMS released updated recommendations](#) to postpone non-emergent, elective, or preventative medical procedures. The updated guidelines outline a tiered approach to prioritize services and care. Through these recommendations, CMS recognizes that decision-making remains the responsibility of local healthcare delivery systems, including state and local health officials, and those clinicians who have direct responsibility for their patients. These recommendations are meant to be refined over the duration of the crisis, based on feedback from subject matter experts.

Expanded Telehealth Services Now Covered by Medicare

Physicians can now provide more services to beneficiaries via telehealth, including emergency department consultations, speech and voice evaluations, as well as smoking and tobacco cessation counseling. [The AMA has published a list of additional CPT codes](#) that Medicare will cover for the duration of the public health crisis caused by COVID-19. Importantly, for physicians caring for seniors and rural patients who may not have internet access or a smart phone, physicians can now provide audio-only telephone evaluation and management visits for new and established patients.

AAO-HNS COVID-19 Podcast Series, Episode 2: CARES Act [March 29]

Gavin Setzen, MD, Past President of the AAO-HNS/F, and John M. Moore, MD, offer insight into how the CARES Act can provide financial relief for your practice. [Listen now](#) and check out other current episodes available in the [COVID-19 podcast series](#).

Action Requested

Check Out AAO-HNS's Resources on COVID-19

The [Coronavirus Disease 2019: Resources](#) page on the AAO-HNS website is a comprehensive list of resources for members on COVID-19 issues impacting the specialty. Here you will find podcasts on COVID-19-related topics, research and Academy Statements on anosmia as a COVID-19 symptom, Position Statements, federal and state financial assistance links, telemedicine updates, journal articles, and resources from other specialties. Please check this website regularly for the latest updates and information on coronavirus from the Academy.

Sincerely,

David S. Boisoneau, MD
BOG Legislative Affairs Committee Chair
and the AAO-HNS Advocacy Team

For more information, contact govtaffairs@entnet.org. Don't forget to bookmark [The ENT Advocate!](#)

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American Academy of Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery
1650 Diagonal Road, Alexandria, VA 22314-2857
Phone: 1-703-836-8444 | Fax: 1-703-683-5100