



Dear ENT Advocacy Network Member:

March 31, 2021

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

Senate Advances Legislation to Suspend Medicare Payment Cuts

On March 25 the Senate passed legislation (H.R. 1868), by a vote of 90-2, to extend the 2% Medicare sequester moratorium set to expire on April 1. The amended bill provides a nine-month extension of the moratorium through December 31. The House of Representatives passed a different version of the legislation earlier this month that would both extend the moratorium through the end of the pandemic and eliminate an additional 4 percent Medicare sequester scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2022. Consequently, the House must pass the Senate language when it returns from its Spring recess in mid-April. The House is expected to vote favorably on the revised language, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services [announced](#) that it will suspend processing April claims until the bill is enacted into law.

The AAO-HNS thanks members of our ENT Advocacy network who responded to our "Call to Action" and raised their voice to prevent this arbitrary cut. We now turn our efforts to eliminating the 4% Medicare cut to physicians slated for next year. Stay tuned for additional calls to action on www.entadvocacy.org !

Legislative and Political Reports

Audiology Groups Announce Joint Effort to Pass Direct Access Legislation

The Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), and the American Academy of Audiology (AAA) recently announced introduction of federal legislation that would grant audiologists "direct access" to Medicare patients, eliminating the long-standing physician referral requirement in current law. [H.R. 1587, the "Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act \(MAASA\) of 2021"](#) was introduced by Representatives Tom Rice (R-SC) and Matt Cartwright (D-PA) on March 3, 2021. For patient safety reasons, the AAO-HNS strongly opposes this legislation. Hearing and balance disorders are medical conditions that require a full patient history, physical examination, and medical diagnosis by an MD/DO. In addition to spearheading a physician community opposition letter, the AAO-HNS is activating a grassroots response through PROJECT 535 and updating our "Call to Action" to send pre-written messages to lawmakers. Contact the AAO-HNS Advocacy Team at govtaffairs@entnet.org for more information or to get involved.

AAO-HNS Advocates for Prohibition of Flavored Tobacco Products

On March 3, the AAO-HNS joined a number of physician and public health organizations in [submitting a letter](#) to Acting U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner, Janet Woodcock, MD, urging prompt action by the agency to prohibit menthol cigarettes and other non-tobacco flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and cigars. The letter notes that flavored products are particularly attractive to young people and lead to increased tobacco initiation. The Academy has long advocated for banning these products and will continue to support tobacco prevention and cessation efforts.

Senate Confirms Xavier Becerra as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services

On March 18, Xavier Becerra was confirmed as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on a [largely party-line vote](#). Becerra served 12 terms in Congress before his election as Attorney General of California. After his swearing in, Secretary Becerra is expected to play a central role in the Administration's pandemic response, as well as working to advance its broader healthcare policy agenda including insurance coverage expansion and prescription drug pricing reform.

Regulatory Reports

UnitedHealthcare Announces Changes to Optum Pay

On March 12, UnitedHealthcare began restoring free access to some claims payment data through its [Optum Pay platform](#). In response to feedback from providers, the company has agreed to allow members to continue to access certain claims payment data through the platform at no cost. Providers enrolled in the paid version of the platform can cancel enrollment by April 1 without penalty. This reversal underscores the importance of physician advocacy efforts in collaborating with third party payers to affect policy changes.

CMS Increases Medicare Payment for COVID-19 Vaccine

On March 15, [the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\) announced an increase, effective immediately](#), to the Medicare payment amount for administering the COVID-19 vaccine. The new payment amount of approximately \$40 per administration is nearly double the amount previously reimbursed, including administration of vaccines requiring two doses. The exact payment rate for administration of each dose of a COVID-19 vaccine will depend on the type of entity that furnishes the service and will be geographically adjusted based on where the service is furnished. The updated Medicare payment rate reflects the additional resources necessary to ensure the vaccine is administered safely and appropriately. These costs are described by CPT code 99072 and are now bundled into the new COVID immunization administration payments.

Action Requested

New Congress, New Contacts to Strengthen PROJECT 535

Successful legislative advocacy starts with a solid grassroots foundation. Given the ambitious legislative agenda for the 117th Congress, it's more important than ever for the Academy to strengthen its "key contacts" network via PROJECT 535. In addition to the Academy's overall advocacy efforts, PROJECT 535 volunteers help reinforce our message by establishing one-to-one relationships with federal elected officials. Federal lawmakers want to hear from YOU—their physician constituents! The commitment is minimal, but the impact is immense. To help further strengthen our collective advocacy efforts, [sign up](#) today or contact govtaffairs@entnet.org for more information.

Register Now for the AAO-HNS/F 2021 Virtual Leadership Forum & BOG Spring Meeting!

Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 17, and register for the AAO-HNS/F 2021 Virtual Leadership Forum & BOG Spring Meeting. This advocacy-based program - complimentary for Academy members - will be held from 10:00 am – 5:00 pm (ET). With the change in Administration and Congress, this one-day session will focus on their new healthcare priorities and what they mean to otolaryngologists. Speakers will share their expertise and perspectives on issues impacting your practice and patient care, as well as presentations on healthcare disparities and the COVID-19 pandemic's near-term effects on the practice of medicine. [Register here today!](#)

Sincerely,

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

If you no longer wish to receive important legislative and political updates via *The ENT Advocate*, please reply to this email with CANCEL ADVOCATE in the subject line.

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