

April 23, 2020

Coronavirus News: CARES Act Funding Developments and Agencies Urged to Improve Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Programs

HHS announces how it will distribute additional funds to providers under CARES Act. The Department of Health and Human Services yesterday [announced](#) that it is distributing additional funds from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund, beginning April 24. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act added \$100 billion to this fund to reimburse health care providers for health care-related expenses or lost revenues not otherwise reimbursed that are attributable to COVID-19. HHS previously distributed \$30 billion from this fund based on providers' proportions of Medicare fee-for-service payments.

According to the HHS announcement, \$20 billion will be allocated to providers generally. The payment made to each provider will take into account what they previously received under the \$30 billion distribution, so that their total allocation under both waves (\$50 billion total) is proportional to their share of 2018 total net patient revenue.

In addition, HHS said that \$10 billion will be allocated to hospitals in areas that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19; \$10 billion to rural hospitals and health clinics; and \$400 million to Indian Health Service facilities. HHS also announced that providers that have treated uninsured patients with COVID-19 on or after Feb. 4, 2020, can request reimbursement at Medicare rates, subject to available funding.

See AHA President and CEO Rick Pollack's [statement](#) yesterday for AHA's reaction to the announcement.

Agencies urged to improve Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Programs.

The AHA and other national hospital organizations today urged the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to make improvements to the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Programs. These include lowering the interest rate on such payments (currently 9.625%), increasing the length of the repayment period and allocating the funds from general revenues rather than from the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Fund.

"Such improvements are necessary to ensure that a program designed to address hospitals' and other health care providers' cash-flow issues associated with responding to COVID-19 does not inadvertently exacerbate these issues once the repayment period begins," the organizations said in a [letter](#) to HHS Secretary Alex Azar and CMS Administrator Seema Verma. They noted that the agencies already have significant regulatory and statutory authority to make changes to the program.

In addition to the AHA, the letter was signed by America's Essential Hospitals, the Association of American Medical Colleges, Catholic Health Association of the United

States, Federation of American Hospitals, National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, Premier healthcare alliance, and Vizient Inc.

The action follows previous letters by AHA urging the agencies to waive or significantly reduce the interest rate for the [programs](#), among other [flexibilities](#).



Medical workers exempt from suspension of new immigrant visas. President Trump yesterday [suspended](#) new immigrant visas for 60 days, [exempting](#) medical and other essential workers combating the COVID-19 emergency.

FDA allows pharmacies to repackage propofol for hospital patients. The Food and Drug Administration this week issued [guidance](#) allowing pharmacies and outsourcing facilities to repackage, under certain conditions and during the public health emergency, FDA-approved propofol drug products for hospitals having difficulty obtaining adequate supplies in the sizes they use to support or treat patients with COVID-19.

Also this week, FDA issued an [emergency use authorization](#) for IntelliVue Patient Monitors to remotely monitor hospital patients and reduce the risk of exposing health care providers to COVID-19.

Nation's governors map COVID-19 recovery strategy. The National Governors Association yesterday unveiled a [roadmap](#) for building the post-COVID-19 public health infrastructure and reopening the nation's economy. Among the group's recommendations is to ensure that the health care system is able to respond to potential surges, in which states should consider:

- developing metrics to assess the health care system's ability to safely treat both COVID-19 patients and all other patients requiring care without resorting to crisis standards of care;
- requiring that health care providers continuously report on numbers of health care worker infections, number of hospital beds and levels of personal protective equipment and other medical equipment (such as ventilators) across the health care system;
- partnering with industry and academic institutions to support PPE manufacturing;
- removing regulatory barriers to establishing alternative sites of care or repurposing existing sites to serve COVID-19 patients in a surge;
- expanding the pool of in-state and out-of-state licensed health care providers, expanding the use of telehealth and ensuring appropriate liability protections; and
- expanding support for health care workers, including services such as child care and eldercare.

The roadmap also seeks to strengthen national surveillance systems, in part by mandating data reporting by hospitals, laboratories and other points of care.

CDC awarding CARES funds to expand surveillance, testing, contact tracing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will award [\\$631 million](#) in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funding to help public health agencies expand surveillance, testing and contact tracing to identify COVID-19 cases, protect vulnerable populations, and work with health care systems to manage and monitor their capacity.

"The ability to implement aggressive contact tracing, surveillance and testing will be fundamental to protecting vulnerable populations as the nation takes steps to reopen and Americans begin returning to their daily lives," said CDC Director Robert Redfield, MD.

CMS offers COVID-19 telehealth toolkit for Medicaid/CHIP. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services today released a [toolkit](#) for states to more quickly adopt Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program policies for telehealth's use during the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit includes population, service and technology considerations for states, along with checklists to follow. It also identifies important factors for providers and pediatric patients. Finally, it provides guidelines for reviewing and adjusting coverage and reimbursement policies.

NIH strategic plan outlines COVID-19 research priorities. The National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases today released a [strategic plan](#) for accelerating research to diagnose, prevent and treat COVID-19. The document outlines four key priorities: improving fundamental knowledge of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19; developing rapid, accurate diagnostics and assays to identify and isolate COVID-19 cases and track the spread of the virus; characterizing and testing potential treatments for COVID-19; and developing safe and effective vaccines to protect individuals from infection and prevent future SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks.

New AHA podcast explores technology's role in fighting COVID-19. As health care unleashes every tool at its disposal against COVID-19, new and evolving technologies are leading the way. This [AHA podcast](#) explores technology's central role in facing down the pandemic in a discussion between Andy Shin, chief operating officer at the AHA Center for Health Innovation, and Kaveh Safavi, head of global health at Accenture.

Responding to COVID-19: Stories from the Front Lines



Patients leave hospital with 'Rocky' theme send-off

Baystate Health, based in Springfield, Mass., celebrates recovered COVID-19 patients leaving its hospitals with staff cheering as the "Rocky" theme song plays. [Read more and see the video.](#)



ICU nurses use teamwork, tech and compassion to care for patients

Intensive care unit nurses at Cedars-Sinai in California who care for some of the sickest COVID-19 patients use technology in creative ways to foster a team atmosphere. [Read more.](#)