



Welcome to Family Medicine Advocacy Rounds—the American Academy of Family Physicians' monthly tip sheet to educate, engage, and update you on the latest policy issues affecting family physicians and their patients.

AAFP Welcomes New and Returning Members to the 118th Congress



Why it matters:

In January, the AAFP welcomed [freshmen](#) and [re-elected](#) members of the 118th Congress. The Academy is focused on advancing policies that ensure our nation has a robust primary care system and all Americans have access to comprehensive, affordable, high-quality health care. We believe there are many opportunities to work together.

What we're working on:

The AAFP is ready to partner with the 118th Congress to work through the challenges facing our nation's health care system to improve the lives of all Americans, including the following:

- Realizing the value of primary care by building delivery and payment systems that prioritize primary and preventive care and provide physicians with the resources and flexibility they need.
- Strengthening our primary care workforce so that it is best positioned to serve all communities, including underserved and rural populations.
- Addressing administrative burdens that stand in the way of effective patient care and better health outcomes.
- Improving health care access, coverage, and affordability for all.
- Prioritizing public health to ensure our country is positioned to address pandemic and other health-related threats.

AAFP Responds to End-of-year Legislation


AAFP Priorities in End of Year Legislation

- Mitigated 2023 Medicare payment cuts
- Extended advanced APM incentive
- Extended Medicare telehealth & audio-only services
- Guardrails for states' Medicaid eligibility redeterminations
- 1 year continuous Medicaid & CHIP coverage for children
- Permanent state option for 1 year postpartum Medicaid coverage
- CHIP funding through 2029
- Protections for pregnant & pumping workers

- Stabilized Medicaid funding for U.S. territories
- Investments in mental health, including the collaborative care model
- Improved access to SUD treatment by eliminating the x-waiver
- New Medicare GME residency slots
- Reauthorized Conrad 30 waiver program
- Enhancements to public health infrastructure & workforce
- Increased funding for HRSA, CDC, NIH & AHRQ



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Why it matters:

The end-of-year omnibus package included important health provisions but fell short of fully resolving the Medicare payment challenges physicians face. [The AAFP strongly urges](#) the 118th Congress to address outdated Medicare physician payment so that patients can access the high-quality care they deserve, and physicians have the resources and flexibility they need to meet beneficiaries' diverse needs.

What we're working on:

The AAFP and other organizations representing 600,000+ physicians and medical students [issued a statement](#) applauding health provisions in the omnibus, including

- protecting patients' access to virtual care, including audio-only telehealth, via the extension of Medicare telehealth flexibilities through the end of 2024;

- permanently enabling states to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for a full year and requiring continuous health care coverage for children enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP for 12 months; and
- investing in new Medicare graduate medical education residency slots that can bolster the primary care and mental health workforce.

We urge Congress to prioritize comprehensive Medicare payment reform this year and look forward to working with lawmakers to advance meaningful policies to improve health outcomes and access to care.

Medicare Payment Reform Top Priority for House of Medicine in 2023

"The AAFP is pleased MedPAC commissioners voted to recommend that Congress update Medicare physician payments in 2024 and implement safety net add-on payments. Enacting these critical recommendations will safeguard access to care, provide urgently needed support for physician practices, and advance health equity."

Tochi Iroku-Malize, MD, MPH, FAAFP
President, American Academy of Family Physicians



Why it matters:

The AAFP is disappointed that Congress did not stop the full Medicare payment cut that physician will face this year. Although lawmakers averted 6.5% of the pending Medicare payment cuts for 2023, family physicians still face an unacceptable 2% reduction in the 2023 Medicare conversion factor.

With rising practice costs, coupled with inflation and a tripledemic, any payment reductions for primary care could threaten practice stability. Reduced physician payment could also jeopardize access to care and undermine our broader goals of advancing health equity and improving connections to primary care.

With the above in mind, the AAFP is pleased that MedPAC commissioners unanimously voted to recommend Congress update Medicare physician payments in 2024—a critical step toward safeguarding access to care for beneficiaries. We're also encouraged the commission voted to recommend safety-net add-on payments for physicians who care for underserved Medicare patients, which will improve equitable access to care and give physicians the support they need to provide the comprehensive, person-centered care every beneficiary deserves.

What we're working on:

- A cornerstone of the AAFP's advocacy efforts is ensuring Medicare physician payment policies support comprehensive and continuous primary care. One of our major areas of focus in 2023 will be calling for an inflationary update and eliminating the annual threat of Medicare cuts. [Read our press release here.](#)
- The AAFP and several other health organizations [sent a joint letter to Congress](#) urging policymakers to work on bipartisan solutions to improve Medicare physician payment. This includes holding hearings and working collaboratively with the clinician workforce to implement inflationary updates and explore payment solutions.

"Medicare physician payment hasn't kept pace with rising practice expenses. Congress will find they have an ally in family physicians when enacting meaningful legislation that will ensure patients can get the care they need and deserve."

Tochi Iroku-Malize, MD, MPH, FAAFP
President, American Academy of Family Physicians



CMS Awards New Family Medicine Residency Slots



Why it matters:

Addressing the primary care physician shortage will require a targeted, equity-focused approach. That's why the AAFP is pleased that [CMS distributed 200 new Medicare Graduate Medical Education residency slots](#) in physician shortage areas, with most going to primary care specialties.

As a result of [AAFP advocacy](#), CMS awarded approximately 60 of those slots to family medicine training programs in underserved areas. CMS' targeted approach in the distribution of the new residency slots is a critical step toward addressing physician shortages and improving equitable access to comprehensive care.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP has [long urged](#) CMS to take concrete steps to improve health equity. One way to do this is by addressing the growing primary care workforce shortage and physician maldistribution.
- We will continue to work with policymakers to tackle physician shortages and disparate access to care and [advocate](#) for investment in federal GME programs to meet the health care needs of our nation.

SAMHSA Removes X-waiver Requirement

Why it matters:

Family physicians and other primary care providers are on the front lines of the opioid and overdose epidemics. As a result of AAFP advocacy, the end-of-year omnibus package removed the X-waiver requirement for prescribers of buprenorphine for opioid use disorder (OUD)

treatment. SAMHSA and DEA's [updated guidance](#) means that more physicians can prescribe lifesaving OUD medication.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP has long advocated to improve access to OUD treatment by removing regulatory hurdles to prescribing buprenorphine. We urge policymakers to ensure physicians can provide evidence-based care without burdensome administrative and financial constraints.

AAFP President to Participate in Panel on Vaccine Access



With respiratory illnesses continuing to put pressure on family physicians, the importance of vaccines has never been more important. On Thursday, January 26 at 1 P.M. ET, AAFP President Dr. Tochi Iroku-Malize will participate in a virtual panel moderated by *The Hill* on the importance of ensuring adults have equitable access to vaccines. [Register to tune in here.](#)

AAFP Responds to FTC Proposal Banning Non-competes



Why it matters:

Earlier this month, the Federal Trade Commission proposed a new regulation that would ban non-compete clauses in employment contracts. Non-compete clauses are uniquely challenging to family medicine's emphasis on longitudinal care and can be used inappropriately to prevent physicians from changing jobs and maintaining patient relationships. The AAFP has long opposed restrictive clauses in employment contracts, which can negatively affect care continuity and the patient-physician relationship when a physician changes practices.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP will provide comments on the proposed rule and will continue to advocate for policies that promote the patient-physician relationship and competition in health care.
- As many as 45% of family physicians in group practices have contracts with non-compete clauses. The AAFP advocates for policies to limit the inappropriate use of such restrictions and ensure ongoing access to care.

For the latest policy updates impacting family medicine, follow us at [@aafp_advocacy](#).



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About American Academy of Family Physicians

Founded in 1947, the AAFP represents 127,600 physicians and medical students nationwide. It is the largest medical society devoted solely to primary care. Family physicians conduct approximately one in five office visits — that's 192 million visits annually or 48 percent more than the next most visited medical specialty. Today, family physicians provide more care for America's underserved and rural populations than any other medical specialty. Family medicine's cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient-physician relationship focused on integrated care. To learn more about the specialty of family medicine and the AAFP's positions on issues and clinical care, visit www.aafp.org. For information about health care, health conditions and wellness, please visit the AAFP's consumer website, www.familydoctor.org.