



Welcome to the summer edition of the AMA's Very Influential Physician (VIP) Insider. Read on for details about these topics:

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- AMA, medical societies ask Congress to refine MACRA
- Summer recesses are coming – are you ready to advocate?
- Marilyn Heine, MD wins inaugural AMPAC Award for Political Participation
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Congress to tackle surprise billing

In the coming weeks Congress is expected to begin considering legislation that would work to address the issue of surprise billing. There is broad agreement that any legislation should protect patients from the failure of their health insurer to provide an adequate network of physicians. Patients who experience true "surprise bills" should be responsible only for the cost-sharing amounts that would have applied if their provider had been in-network. At the same time, steps must be taken to assure that plans are not given financial incentives to further restrict their networks or to offer physicians take-it-or-leave-it rates without negotiating in good faith.

In addition:

- When the minimum payment for out-of-network physicians should incorporate charge data from sources independent of payers or other stakeholders.
- When the minimum insurer payment for out-of-network care is insufficient, and independent dispute resolution (IDR) process should be used to determine a fair amount. The IDR should be structured with clear factors that the arbiter must consider when deciding, including the rate that physicians charge for that service in the area.
- At no point should negotiated, discounted in-network rates provided to contracted physicians or Medicare rates be used as a benchmark to determine fair payment to out-of-network physicians.
- To ensure that patients are completely protected, benefits should be assigned to the physician or other provider so that they may pursue payment directly with the insurer.

States that have adopted similar systems for health insurance markets they regulate have reported significant drops in the instances of surprise bill complaints. Any similar federal regulation should apply to ERISA plans that are beyond the reach of state regulation.

Congress should ensure that patients are reasonably able to access the benefits their health plans promised when they signed up for coverage. Insurers must also ensure that their provider directories are accurate and up-to-date so patients can make informed decisions about their care.

It is also imperative that any federal bill include strong and enforceable network adequacy requirements and that federal parity laws be enforced to ensure patients have access to in-network physicians to prevent surprise bills before they happen.

Please [contact your members of Congress today](#) and ask them to support surprise billing legislation that protects the patient and holds insurers accountable for failing to provide adequate networks of physicians.

AMA, medical societies ask Congress to refine MACRA

The AMA along with 120 state medical and national specialty societies sent a [letter to congressional leaders](#) calling for refinements to the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA). MACRA remains an improvement over the sustainable growth rate formula it replaced, but the joint letter urges Congress to build on the lessons learned during the initial years of implementation to help physicians succeed and patients thrive.

Specifically, the AMA and medical societies urged Congress to replace the scheduled physician payment freeze from 2020 through 2025 under MACRA with positive payment updates to reflect increases in practice costs and preserve patient access. In addition, to provide physicians with a longer on-ramp to move to alternative payment models (APM), Congress should extend the APM incentive payments for an additional six years. Finally, the letter advocates that Congress work with the medical community to make technical improvements to MACRA, such as providing the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) with greater flexibility to streamline reporting under the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) and adjust APM participation thresholds.

Summer recesses are coming – are you ready to advocate?

Every summer Congress ditches the heat of Washington, DC and heads home for extended in-district work periods or "recesses" if you live inside the beltway. These district work periods provide an excellent opportunity for you to advocate on the issues important to medicine.

Please [visit our advocacy site](#) for more information on the hot-button issues facing the profession today. Many members spend the upcoming July 4th recess along with the month of August back in their districts holding town hall events, meeting with constituents and most

importantly listening to the concerns of the people they represent. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to schedule a district meeting or attend a town hall with your elected officials.

Simply visit our [congressional directory](#) to find the district office contact information for your legislators or visit [Town Hall Project](#) to easily find when your member of Congress will be holding a town hall near you.

And don't forget to take photos of your interaction! Please email the photo, names of participants and a brief description to political.affairs@ama-assn.org, and we'll post them in a future issue of the VIP Insider and share them through our Physicians Grassroots Network social media followers on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

Dr. Marilyn Heine wins the inaugural AMPAC Award for Political Participation

Last year, AMPAC launched the Award for Political Participation to recognize an AMPAC member who did outstanding work on behalf of medicine during the last election cycle. AMPAC received eight outstanding nominees from across the country making the decision a difficult one for the AMPAC Board of Trustees. In the end it was decided that Dr. Marilyn Heine would be the inaugural recipient for the award.

Dr. Heine was recognized and presented her award at the AMPAC luncheon at 2019 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago. In his remarks, AMPAC Chair Lyle Thorstenson, MD stated that "Dr. Heine worked tirelessly to help Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, a pro-physician legislator, secure his re-election in one of the closest races in the country. She organized fundraisers, formed the "Physicians for Brian Fitzpatrick" group and mobilized an impressive GOTV campaign as election day was drawing near and in his supporting letter, Congressman Fitzpatrick stated that Dr. Heine played a vital role in his re-election."

Dr. Heine is a long-time member of the VIP program and a dogged advocate for both her profession and her patients. Congratulations Dr. Heine on your well-deserved recognition!



VIP Exclusive: 2019 Congressional calendar

As a VIP member you now have access to the 2019 Congressional calendar we developed for the program. With this downloadable calendar you'll never have to House and Senate are in session again. Use it to plan your next advocacy event campaign. [Download your calendar today!](#)