



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

- August recess is in full swing, now is the time to advocate
- Charlie Cook's 2020 Look Ahead: House
- The influence ladder: What the best and worst advocacy tactics
- Physician advocates in action

August recess is in full swing, now is the time to advocate

It's the dog days of summer and August recess is in full swing. While it may not seem like it, this is the perfect time for you to take advantage of your members of Congress' district work period to advocate on pressing health care related issues including – surprise billing and improvements to MACRA.

Surprise Billing

As you know, in recent weeks Congress has taken significant steps in moving legislation aimed at tackling the issue of surprise billing by passing legislation out of committees in both the House and Senate. Both bills would protect patients by limiting their out-of-pocket costs to amounts they would have owed if they had been treated by an in-network physician. However, neither bill holds health insurers accountable. Both bills would resolve payment disputes between physicians and insurers by setting out-of-network payments at the median amount each insurer pays for in-network care.

This is a serious flaw that needs to be fixed. The physician advocacy community may have opportunities with two other House committees to make further improvements on this and other elements in the legislation, but we can't leave anything to chance. That's why physician advocacy this recess is so important.

Our August Recess "[Action Kit](#)" on surprised billing has all the information you'll need to be an effective advocate on this issue!

MACRA

After a 15 year fight to replace the flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) payment system in Medicare reimbursement rates, Congress finally acted, and passed the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) in 2015. Since the enactment of MACRA, physician organizations have worked closely with both Congress and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to promote a smooth implementation of key components of the law.

Unfortunately, it has become clear that further refinements are needed to improve the program and ensure physicians can be successful moving forward. During the first five years, the law had provided for modest payment increases, but payment rates still have not kept up with inflation. To make matters worse, the statute calls for zero percent payment update for years 2020-2025.

This problem is real and if Congress doesn't act, many physicians who see Medicare patients will be negatively affected.

This is where you come in, we're asking you to reach out to your members of Congress this August recess and urge them to support the following three ways to improve MACRA:

- Implement positive payment adjustments for physicians to replace the payment freeze over the next six years;
- Extend the Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APM) bonus payments for an additional six years, and;
- Implement additional technical improvements to MACRA

Once again, we have posted an on-line [Action Kit](#) to give you the information you need to be an effective advocate on this issue.

Please take advantage of this district work period to schedule a district meeting or attend a town hall with your elected officials. Simply visit our [congressional directory](#) or call toll free (800) 833-6354 to be connected with your legislators' district offices or visit [Town Hall Project](#) to easily find when your member of Congress will be holding a town hall or constituent event near you.

Unable to attend a district event during the recess? Please take a moment to [write your members of Congress](#) about improving MACRA today!

Charlie Cook's 2020 look ahead: House

The National Journal's political handicapper Charlie Cook just released his updated 2020 House race ratings (see slide below) provide insight into the competitiveness of House seats by political party for the upcoming 2020 election. Rep. Will Hurd (R-TX-23) announced that he will not seek reelection in 2020, moving the district from Toss Up to Lean Democrat. In addition, two districts became more competitive, with PA-10 moving to Toss Up and FL-16 moving from to Likely Republican. Two districts became less competitive, with MO-2 moving to Likely Republican and FL-26 moving to Solid Democrat.

House Republicans are defending 39 competitive seats to 53 competitive Democratic seats



Our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) wanted to identify the least and most influential advocacy tactics. To find out, they asked congressional staff the following question:

“If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?”

Here is what they found were the best and worst advocacy tactics

The Best – Face-to-face interaction with constituents. Fifty-four percent (54%) of congressional staff say that meetings with constituents have “a lot of positive influence,” followed by 46% who said that contact from constituents representatives (such as organization leaders, elected officials, or large business owners) has a lot of positive influence on their decisions.

The Worst – Mass email campaigns and petitions. Only 3% of congressional staff say that form emails and petitions have a lot of positive influence.

NOT Like as Seen on TV – What about lobbyists? The media and Hollywood present a narrative that lobbyists and policymakers cut deals behind the scenes in dark, smoke-filled rooms. CMF’s research says otherwise with only 8% of congressional staff saying that a visit from a lobbyist has “a lot of positive influence.” Lobbyists serve an important role in the decision-making process, but they aren’t credible without the backing of constituents. Lobbyists that cannot demonstrate that constituents support their position are viewed with a raised eyebrow by Capitol Hill.

Their findings continue to find that face-to-face interactions with your members of Congress are the most effective way to be a successful advocate on the issues that are important to you. You elect them in to office, they want to hear from you!

Physician advocates in action



New York physician Rose Berkun, MD with Congressman Tom Reed (R-NY)



Virginia physicians at an event with Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA)



Pennsylvania physicians meeting with Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)



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