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## 2020 Issue Brief COVID-19 Pandemic

### Issue

While the United States works together to respond to the COVID-19 public health crisis, AMGA's members remain on the frontlines of screening and treating patients in their communities. As providers reconfigure care delivery processes to identify and treat patients with COVID-19, they are also ensuring their other patients are protected by keeping them away from their facilities until it is safe for them to return. As a result, what was previously considered normal patient volume will not resume for an extended time. While this course of action is in the best interest of patients, it has brought about significant revenue implications. It is critical that Congress provide mechanisms to ensure enough cash flow for multispecialty medical groups and integrated systems of care so they can weather this unprecedented crisis.

As Congress continues its COVID-19 relief efforts, AMGA asks that any funding and policy strategies to address this pandemic support our providers as they care for all their patients. AMGA asks that policymakers consider the following:

#### *Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund*

AMGA appreciates Congress' direct financial support by including \$175 billion in relief funding in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act to healthcare providers under the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund. In addition to this support, AMGA members are using every possible tactic to remain viable: furloughing employees, cutting salaries, exhausting reserves (built up over decades), and accessing commercial loans. Despite these measures, some groups and systems remain at risk to close. Closure of any large medical group or health system would have a destructive and long-term impact on the health and financial wellbeing of the communities they serve.

This perilous situation requires immediate assistance if AMGA's members are to survive and continue to meet the needs of patients – both today and after the pandemic. AMGA asks that Congress continue to exercise oversight over the distribution of these funds to ensure that providers are receiving them in an efficient, effective, and timely manner. In addition, AMGA asks Congress to continue funding the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund in future legislative packages to mitigate any further impact.

#### *Improving the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payments Program*

A reliable loan program is necessary to assist multispecialty medical groups and integrated systems of care with actual and anticipated revenue loss because of the higher operating costs

from this health emergency. The Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payments (AAP) Program is a key part of the response to COVID-19.

To date, the AAP Program has extended more than \$100 billion in loans to providers. AMGA thanks Congress for making key improvements to the AAP Program in [H.R. 8337](#), the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act of 2020, such as reducing the high interest rates and increasing the previously short time periods for repayment of these loans. Now, Congress should pass [H.R. 6837](#), the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payments Improvement Act. This would reopen the AAP to new applicants after CMS ended the application process.

#### *Permanently Lift Restrictive Barriers in Telehealth*

This public health crisis has forced providers across the nation to reevaluate the way they deliver care. The new reality for AMGA providers is to utilize telehealth technology for their patient population regardless of their COVID-19 status. Congress should continue to take actions to streamline the delivery of treatment via telehealth.

Congress has enacted legislation to waive Medicare's geographic limitations during this national emergency through H.R. 6074, the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020, significantly changing healthcare delivery. This pandemic has exposed the underlying flaws in the site-of-service limitations for telehealth services and how these limitations neglect the needs of many Medicare beneficiaries. All Medicare beneficiaries should have access to care based on what they and their providers determine is the most clinically appropriate. Given that telehealth has become the new "norm," AMGA requests that these Medicare telehealth waivers be extended permanently.

#### **AMGA Asks Congress to:**

- Continue to exercise oversight over the distribution of the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund in future legislative packages to mitigate further negative impact on providers and ensure that providers receive funds in an efficient, effective, and timely manner.
- Approve the Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payments Improvement Act, which would restart the AAP Program for hospitals and healthcare providers delivering essential care during this public health emergency.
- Permanently extend Medicare telehealth waivers.