

July 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-222
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy and Leader Schumer:

The group of undersigned organizations appreciate previous actions taken by Congress and the Administration to assist physicians, clinicians, and hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic. These frontline workers have been tirelessly treating, diagnosing, and staging care for COVID-19 patients, while trying to maintain, or restart essential procedures or scans and treatments for non-COVID patients.

As you consider additional relief to address the public health and economic strains of this crisis, we strongly urge you to support members of the healthcare delivery system as they continue to treat COVID-19 patients and others seeking care for other ongoing health conditions:

1. Waive budget neutrality for the Medicare payment changes for evaluation and management (E/M) services that are slated to be implemented on January 1, 2021

As providers manage the challenges of re-opening, re-activating, or suspending services again depending on the severity of the pandemic in their area, now is not the time to implement payment change policies that will generate even greater instability for healthcare providers. We are concerned about the sizable cuts, especially as it relates to evaluation and management services (E/M) included in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) final Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) rule for CY 2020. We request that Congress waive the budget neutrality provisions for E/M services in the Medicare rule and prevent further economic burdens for healthcare providers.

2. Provide Medicare Loan Forgiveness for Hospitals and Health Providers

Hospitals and other providers are facing staggering losses and severe economic outlooks as they struggle to treat COVID-19 patients and face instability in whether they can see non-emergent and elective procedure patients. The associated costs with purchasing needed PPE, additional equipment, and providing for their frontline workers leads to even further deficits. Without relief, hospitals and other providers will be significantly under-resourced to continue fighting this pandemic. We request that Congress forgive the accelerated advanced payments made under the CARES Act to ensure hospitals and other providers can continue functioning as the full-time fight against the COVID-19 pandemic continues on.

3. *Allow for temporary payment increase to Medicare providers to defray the costs of PPE and other infection control activities*

As a result of the COVID-19 emergency, health care providers have experienced major disruptions in their health care delivery services, and significantly higher costs for infection control, PPE, and other capital improvements to ensure the safety of their patients and practitioners. Medicare reimbursement methodologies for providers and suppliers are based on prior years' costs and do not reflect higher costs associated with additional infection control necessities. We request that Congress provide an additional payment equal to 1 percent of the amount paid for services until December 31, 2021 to defray these additional costs.

4. *Establish a loan program for capital equipment during the coronavirus pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of having high-quality, up-to date capital equipment to diagnose, monitor, and stage treatment. With providers sustaining such extreme losses, the ability for them to continue updating and maintaining their capital equipment has diminished. We recommend Congress establish, or allow for the flexibility of Provider Relief Funds, to be used for a capital equipment loan program.

5. *Extend suspension of Medicare sequestration cuts*

We would like to thank Congress for a provision in the CARES Act that temporarily suspended the 2% Medicare sequestration cuts between May 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. This action resulted in immediate, substantial relief to providers across the country amidst unprecedented financial challenges while they seek to provide necessary patient care. However, as it becomes clearer that challenges surrounding COVID-19 will continue for health care providers beyond this calendar year, we ask that Congress extend the suspension of the sequestration cuts to December 31, 2021. By extending the suspension for an additional year, providers will be given predictability in their financial relief as they seek to address substantial patient care backlogs and begin to re-open recently closed facilities, or recall staff from necessary reductions in force, due to elective procedure prohibitions and other governmental orders surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

We welcome the opportunity to work with Congress, the Administration, and other stakeholders on these concepts, or other efforts, to support and ensure stability for the health care delivery system. Thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,

American College of Radiology
American Society of Radiologic Technologists
Association for Quality Imaging
Centers for Diagnostic Imaging

Medical Imaging & Technology Alliance
Radiology Business Management Association
Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging