



AAFP News: AAFP Edition

Policy and Health Issues in the News

Panelists: Congress Must Fund Public Health Prevention Campaigns

Proposed cuts to prevention programs being considered in Congress could leave the country vulnerable to outbreaks of disease, according to panelists at a recent forum hosted by the National Coalition on Health Care. Panelists called on lawmakers to maintain funding for the Prevention and Public Health Fund, which was established by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to address immunizations, prevention of injuries in older adults, prevention of diabetes mellitus, and other public health initiatives. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2016 has prevented 381 million illnesses and avoided 855,000 early deaths, and every dollar spent on childhood vaccines saves \$10. However, public health campaigns need support from the federal level to sustain positive outcomes, and one panelist noted that many local communities have cut back on public health initiatives in recent years. The CDC recommended allocating \$1 billion in federal funding for immunizations in 2018, but Congress is discussing a figure between \$550 million and \$600 million—less than the \$606 million budgeted for 2017. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20171102nchcprevention.html>.

AAFP Responds to Proposed HHS Strategy

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has drafted a plan detailing how the agency will achieve its mission over the next several years through five strategic goals. These goals are to reform, strengthen, and modernize the U.S. health care system; protect the health of Americans where they live, learn, work, and play; strengthen the economic and social well-being of Americans across their life spans; foster sound, sustained advances in the sciences; and promote effective and efficient management and stewardship. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) responded to HHS' request for feedback with a letter focusing on issues that frustrate family physicians, such as burgeoning prior authorizations, lack of interoperability of electronic health records, and the cost to physicians to provide interpretation services to their patients. The AAFP argued that the plan must address the need to reduce administrative and regulatory burdens for physicians. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20171030hhsstrategy.html>.

CDC Advises Physicians on Treating Patients Affected by Hurricanes

The CDC recently issued an advisory offering recommendations for assessing patients living or working in or recently returned from hurricane-affected areas such as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The CDC said there are accounts of infectious disease in affected areas stemming from compromised drinking water and decreased access to safe water, food, and shelter. Family physicians who care for patients from these areas should be vigilant for diseases such as leptospirosis, dengue, hepatitis A infection, typhoid fever, vibriosis, and influenza, as well as less common infectious diseases in patients who present with acute respiratory illness, gastroenteritis, renal or hepatic failure, wound infection, or other febrile illness. The CDC also recommended considering empiric therapy pending results of diagnostic tests for certain conditions; contacting local health authorities about patients in whom leptospirosis, dengue, hepatitis A infection, typhoid, or vibriosis is suspected; and immediately reporting confirmed cases of these diseases. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/health-of-the-public/20171102cdchurricanerecs.html>.

AAFP Responds to Proposed VA Rule Expanding Telehealth Services

The AAFP recently responded to a proposed rule from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that addresses telehealth services. AAFP Board Chair John Meigs, MD, acknowledged the VA's goal of increasing beneficiary access to mental health services, subspecialty services, and general clinical care, and noted that the proposed rule would preempt state licensure, registration, and certification laws when those laws hinder the ability of health care professionals to practice telehealth. "The AAFP strongly believes our veterans are best served by having access to comprehensive primary care services provided by well-trained family physicians and other appropriate primary care physicians," Meigs wrote. "Telehealth services can be an adjunct in certain situations but cannot replace a meaningful relationship with a personal primary care physician." For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20171106vatelehealth.html>.

— AAFP AND AAFP NEWS STAFF

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