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AAP News

'Dire situation' for frontline physicians prompts letter to administration for financial relief

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Editor's note: For the latest news on coronavirus disease 2019, visit <https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

The AAP joined two other physician groups in an urgent request to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar for financial relief as physicians face economic struggles due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Two waves of emergency funding have mostly bypassed pediatricians, family physicians, obstetricians and gynecologists, who are grappling with financial challenges that are leading to layoffs and practice closures.

"The situation facing frontline physicians is dire," stated the letter from the AAP, American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), which represent 260,000 physicians.

Many of the physicians were excluded or received very few funds from the first \$30 billion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act because they treat few or no patients enrolled in Medicare.

Despite indications that Medicaid providers would be prioritized in the second wave of funding, HHS recently announced the next allotment would be distributed to physicians and others who have billed Medicare.

The letter to HHS stressed that many physicians were excluded or received very little from the first \$30 billion and are not eligible for the additional \$20 billion from the general allocation because they do not treat Medicare-enrolled patients and did not file Medicare fee-for-service claims in 2019.

Access to care already is diminishing, which will threaten patients' health, according to the letter.

"These dangerous declines put the country at risk of a secondary outbreak of a vaccine-preventable illness during COVID-19 and portend a challenging environment when schools eventually seek to reopen," the letter stated. Shelter-in-place orders also have led to a spike in emergency calls for child abuse injuries and intimate partner violence.

The AAP, AAFP and ACOG urged collaboration with the Trump administration to discuss the suggested approaches the physician groups have provided to disburse funds that ensure adequate financial assistance and rapid distribution.

"Put simply, our physician members need to be able to keep their doors open and continue treating patients," the groups stated.