



Senate Releases Policy Options Document

The Senate Finance Committee last month released the first in a series of policy options for health care reform. The document “Transforming the Health Care Delivery System: Proposals to Improve Patient Care and Reduce Health Care Costs,” addresses short- and long-term payment reform options and infrastructure investments to support delivery system reform. The committee is expected to release similar proposals addressing coverage and financing this month, with the goal of receiving input from the Senators and the public, including the physician community, before crafting a bipartisan health reform plan for the committee to act on in June. Highlights of the document include —

Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) Options

The paper outlines options for a multi-year Medicare physician payment patch but no long-term reform. It states that the committee is continuing to explore physician payment options. The ACC will continue to advocate for a long-term solution to the flawed payment formula. Under the options proposed, physicians would face significant payment cuts following two years of positive updates.

Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI)

The paper proposes improvements to the PQRI, including an appeals process and more timely feedback. It also proposes a new maintenance of certification participation option, as well as options for continuing incentive payments for the next few years, followed by penalties for failure to successfully participate. While the ACC supports improvements to the PQRI program and continued incentive payments, there are serious concerns about imposing penalties under the current program.

Imaging

The paper proposes several new options to reform how imaging is delivered and paid, including:

- requiring disclosure to patients at the time of a referral about any financial interest in certain advanced imaging services
- establishing a diagnostic imaging exchange
- creating a confidential education and feedback program
- providing incentive payments based on adherence to appropriate use criteria
- using radiology benefit managers (RBMs) for certain imaging services.

The ACC supports efforts to help physicians order imaging appropriately but has significant concerns about the use of RBMs in the Medicare program.

Primary Care and General Surgery Bonus

The paper proposes bonuses of at least 5 percent for five years for primary care physicians, as well as for general surgeons serving in newly defined rural general-surgery-scarcity areas. This would be paid for by across-the-board cuts for all other codes or from other funding sources. The ACC supports efforts to bolster primary care but does not support doing so by cutting payment for other critical Medicare services.

Quality Measurement

The paper proposes providing increased resources for strengthening and improving the quality measurement and development processes and requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a strategy

for improving the public reporting of quality and performance information.

Specialty Hospitals

The Finance Committee policy options paper proposes limiting the growth of specialty hospitals. The ACC opposes efforts that undermine physicians’ ability to operate specialty hospitals; we support physician ownership in facilities, equipment or services that benefit patients through the delivery of appropriate, high quality, medical care.

Physician-Industry Sunshine

The paper proposes setting a plan for transparency in the relationship between physicians and manufacturers.

Other Issues

- Timeline for rolling out new policies related to bundling and re-admissions
- Options for addressing the workforce crisis
- Timeline and policy options for allowing groups of providers to share in Medicare cost-savings
- Long-term framework outlining national priorities for comparative clinical effectiveness research

The Finance Committee is accepting public comments on the document through May 15. The ACC will submit comments. The ACC continues to work with members of Congress and their staff to ensure that any draft legislation will strengthen, not hinder, the ability of practices to provide quality care to their patients. For more information on the ACC’s health reform efforts, visit qualityfirst.acc.org. You can also share your thoughts on this proposal at the ACC’s online forum, “The Lewin Report” (lewinreport.acc.org).