



Overview: 2011 Federal Legislative Priorities

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) is committed to the enactment of legislation that will strengthen the delivery of, and access to, quality healthcare in this nation. To that end, the AAO-HNS urges Congress to appropriately address the following issues in 2011:

Repeal of the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB)

The IPAB, an unelected, unaccountable body of individuals appointed solely by the President and charged with creating Medicare payment policy, usurps the rightful authority of our elected officials to create and shape Medicare policy. By limiting Congressional authority, IPAB essentially eliminates the transparency of hearings, debate, and the meaningful opportunity of stakeholder input. In fact, fewer than half of the IPAB members can be healthcare providers, and none are permitted to be practicing physicians or be otherwise employed. **Members of Congress are urged to support H.R. 452, the Medicare Decisions Accountability Act of 2011.**

Permanent Repeal of the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) Formula

The volatility and instability of the Medicare payment system is threatening Medicare beneficiaries' access to healthcare. Continued payment cuts, rising practice costs, and a lack of certainty going forward, make it difficult, if not impossible, for already financially-challenged physician practices to continue to treat Medicare patients. Over the past decade, the AAO-HNS and others in the physician community has repeatedly advocated for the reform and redesign of the unstable and unsustainable Medicare physician payment formula. However, Congress' failure to enact permanent reform has created an instability and uncertainty that undermines the ability of physicians to plan for the future, to provide for their employees, and to make investments to help improve the quality and efficiency of the care they provide. **Members of Congress are urged to support inclusion of provisions to repeal the SGR formula and develop a new Medicare physician payment system in any deficit reduction plan. In addition, Congress must act to stop the impending 27.4 percent cut in Medicare physician payments scheduled for January 1, 2012.**

Reduce Healthcare Delivery Costs by Enacting Comprehensive Medical Liability Reforms

The nation's current medical liability system places patients in jeopardy of losing their access to vital healthcare services. With affordable and adequate medical liability insurance becoming difficult to find, physicians are retiring early, limiting their practices, or moving to states with less costly premiums. This disturbing trend is leaving entire communities without access to critical healthcare services. As a specialty, in an effort to reduce and learn from instances of medical error, we have committed substantial resources to and engaged our members in proactive quality improvement initiatives. However, further statutory changes are necessary to address flaws in our current tort system and enact proven reforms to reduce frivolous lawsuits, including reasonable caps on non-economic damages. **Members of Congress are urged to support H.R. 5/S. 1099, the HEALTH Act of 2011.**

Support Clarity and Transparency in Healthcare Advertisements

Currently, there is little "transparency" associated with the most fundamental and important component of healthcare delivery – the many health professionals who interact with patients every day. Recent studies confirm America's patients prefer a physician-led approach to healthcare and are often confused about the level of training and education of their healthcare providers - including physicians, technicians, nurses, physician assistants, and other allied providers. Because of this uncertainty, patient autonomy and decision-making have been compromised. America's patients deserve to be fully informed and able to easily identify in healthcare advertisements their providers' credentials, licenses, and training when seeking treatment. **Members of Congress are urged to support H.R. 451, the Healthcare Truth and Transparency Act of 2011.**

Oppose Audiology Direct Access to Medicare Patients

The AAO-HNS strongly believes a physician-led hearing healthcare team with coordination of services is the best approach for providing the highest quality care to patients. In past years, the audiology community has pursued unlimited direct access to Medicare patients without a physician referral, and the AAO-HNS has repeatedly opposed such legislative efforts due to significant patient safety concerns. Hearing and balance disorders are medical conditions that require a full patient history and physical examination by a physician. While audiologists play a critical role in providing quality hearing healthcare, their desire to independently diagnose hearing disorders transcends their level of training and expertise. **Members of Congress are urged to oppose H.R. 2140 to ensure patient safety is preserved.**

The AAO-HNS is the national medical association of physicians dedicated to the care of patients with disorders of the ears, nose, throat (ENT), and related structures of the head and neck. We are commonly referred to as ENT physicians.

For more information on AAO-HNS federal legislative priorities, contact the Government Affairs team at legfederal@entnet.org.