

# Hospice and Palliative Care Resources for the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)



## NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 09/04/20

NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share recent news and helpful links. Please note, these Updates are published when there is helpful news to share.

*"There is nothing permanent except change." — Heraclitus*

### Policy Update

#### **HHS Releases Rural Action Plan**

On Thursday September 3, [HHS released the Rural Action Plan](#), the first HHS-wide assessment of rural healthcare efforts in more than 18 years and the product of HHS's Rural Task Force, a group of experts and leaders across the department first put together by Secretary Azar in 2019. This action plan provides a roadmap for HHS to strengthen departmental coordination to better serve the millions of Americans who live in rural communities across the United States. Eighteen HHS agencies and offices took part in developing the plan, which includes 71 new or expanded activities for FY 2020 and beyond. As the Rural Action Plan was developed, the HHS Rural Task Force also played a key role in the COVID-19 pandemic response, ensuring that HHS accounted for the unique challenges faced by rural communities. This is a nice compliment to the announcement by HHS and others earlier in the week that is expanding broadband access to rural areas.

#### **Administration Announces \$2 Billion Provider Relief Fund Nursing Home Incentive Payment Plans**

HHS, through the HRSA, is announcing the details of a [\\$2 billion Provider Relief Fund](#) (PRF) performance-based incentive payment distribution to nursing homes. This distribution is the latest update in the previously announced [\\$5 billion in](#) planned support to nursing homes grappling with the impact of COVID-19. Last week, HHS announced it had delivered an additional [\\$2.5 billion](#) in payments to nursing homes to help with upfront COVID-19-related expenses for testing, staffing, and personal protective equipment (PPE) needs. Other resources are also being dedicated to support training, mentorship and safety improvements in nursing homes.

#### **Preliminary Medicare COVID-19 Data Snapshot**

CMS released their monthly [Medicare COVID-19 Data Snapshot](#) that reports COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations for Medicare beneficiaries diagnosed with COVID-19. This [fact sheet](#) gives you aggregate data and visuals from Medicare Fee-for-Service claims data, Medicare Advantage encounter data, and Medicare enrollment information. All data in this fact sheet are preliminary and will continue to change as CMS processes more claims and encounters for the reporting period.

#### **September 2020 MedPAC Meeting**

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) held a virtual meeting on [September 3 and 4](#) to discuss Medicare issues and policy questions related to telehealth, cost-sharing for vaccinations and the impact of COVID-19 on hospitals, post-acute care, physicians and providers. MedPAC reported the following:

- COVID-19 has greatly impacted patient mortality and access (80% of COVID-19 deaths are in the 65 and older population).
- CARES Act Grants will cover losses at hospitals in the short term, with for-profit systems faring better than nonprofits during the public health emergency.
- The Medicare trust fund’s projected insolvency has been accelerated by COVID-19, with some experts estimating it will be insolvent by 2024.
- MedPAC is considering which telehealth expansions afforded during the public health emergency should be made permanent, including consideration of what safeguards need to be implemented.
- MedPAC is considering options to alter reimbursement for vaccinations, including an option to cover all vaccines under Part B with no cost sharing.

NHPCO was present at MedPAC’s virtual meeting this week and we will continue to track these issues closely. Providers should remember that MedPAC is an advisory body that makes recommendations to Congress, which means that Congress must adopt the necessary legislative changes to put MedPAC recommendations into effect.

## **Provider Update**

### **Warning Letter for Fraudulent COVID-19 Products**

As part of the FDA’s effort to protect consumers, the agency issued a warning letter jointly with the Federal Trade Commission to [1 Party At A Time](#) for selling an unapproved product with fraudulent COVID-19 claims. The company sells BetterFly, a niacin containing product, with false or misleading claims that the product can mitigate, prevent, treat, diagnose, or cure COVID-19 in people. There are currently no FDA-approved products to prevent or treat COVID-19. FDA requested that 1 Party At A Time immediately stop selling this unapproved and unauthorized product. Consumers concerned about COVID-19 should consult with their health care provider.

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