



January 3, 2025

To the Members of the 119th Congress:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents more than 130,000 family physicians and medical students across the United States, we write to congratulate you on your election to the 119th Congress. We look forward to working closely with you to advance policies that invest in family physicians and the communities they serve.

Family physicians are uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive care for the entire family – from birth through end-of-life. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, each organ system and every disease entity, including pediatrics, obstetrics and reproductive care, and behavioral health. It is a specialty in breadth that integrates the biological, clinical, and behavioral sciences. This includes: caring for patients regardless of age or health condition, understanding community-level factors and health-related social needs, providing support as the patient's first contact for health concerns, helping patients navigate specialty and hospital care coordination, leveraging data and technology to improve the quality of care, and assessing the patient's family medical history to dictate the appropriate degrees of care.

In the United States, one in five office visits are conducted by family physicians, with 195 million visits to family physicians annually. Family physicians are embedded in nearly every congressional district across the country, from suburban and urban to small, rural communities. In many instances, they are the only physician located in a given area. Their unique training and scope of expertise allows them to tailor their care delivery to meet the exact needs of their communities.

As the 119th Congress commences, we believe there are opportunities to work with you all on the priorities identified below, which will help ensure accessible, affordable health care for all Americans.

Recognizing the Value of Primary Care - Primary care serves as the foundation of a strong health care system, involving but not limited to the provision of preventive care, chronic disease and acute care management, and continuity of care. Recognizing its value is crucial for improving health outcomes, reducing health care costs, and enhancing patient satisfaction. Areas with more primary care physicians such as family physicians have lower total healthcare costs due to better preventive care and fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits. Patient who regularly see a primary care physician have a 19% lower chance of dying prematurely than those who only see another specialist. Unfortunately, fewer Americans have reported having a consistent relationship with a primary care physician in recent years. More resources and support are needed to ensure that our nation appropriately values primary care for what it is: the bedrock of our health care system. To achieve this, Congress can:

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- Increase federal investments in primary care by enacting long-term, comprehensive reforms to fee-for-service payment, including the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, to ensure the longitudinal, continuous relationship between the patient and their primary care is appropriately valued;
- Support promising alternative payment models being tested and help facilitate a more meaningful transition to value-based payment by revising the criteria used to evaluate and measure the success of primary care models; and
- Support the viability of independent physician practices and protect physicians' clinical autonomy by addressing health care consolidation and misaligned incentives, such as site of service payment differentials.

Reducing Administrative Burden - Administrative tasks, such as excessive documentation, prior authorizations, and billing requirements, consume valuable time and resources for health care clinicians. Reducing this burden allows physicians to focus more on patient care, enhances job satisfaction, and increases efficiency within the health care system, ultimately improving the quality of care and patient outcomes. Congress can:

- Permanently reign in and reform the use of utilization management processes by insurers that delay patients' timely access to care, including prior authorization and step therapy;
- Streamline and reduce the burden associated with quality and performance measurement and reporting;
- Implement policies that leverage the potential of artificial intelligence as a means of reducing burden while combatting uses that risk harm to patient care and outcomes; and
- Ensure physician practices, including small and independent practices, are not left vulnerable to cyberattacks and are equipped with the necessary resources and support to respond.

Increasing and Sustaining the Primary Care Workforce - Family physicians are in high demand, yet the workforce faces shortages due to an aging population and physician burnout. Increasing and sustaining the workforce requires policies that promote training, support, and retention of family physicians. Efforts like enhanced medical education, loan forgiveness programs, and better compensation are essential to attracting and maintaining a strong family physician workforce. To this end, Congress can:

- Ensure that tax reform benefits both independent practices and employed physicians;

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- Adequately fund and expand the Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education Program, the National Health Service Corps, and any other programs that help to recruit, train, and retain primary care physicians;
- Implement transparency reforms for traditional Graduate Medical Education to ensure that funds are focused on supporting and expanding the primary care physician workforce, especially in underserved areas;
- Provide financial incentives for medical students to address their medical debt and encourage them to practice in low access rural areas;
- Support physician-led care teams to ensure that all patients receive the safest, highest quality care; and
- Address the use of overly restrictive noncompete agreements in employment contracts that limit patient access to care, hinder physicians' career choices, and contribute to physician burnout and shortages.

Improving Health Care - Ensuring that all Americans have access to high-quality health care is essential for improving both individual and population health. This involves addressing disparities in health care access, affordability, and quality. Policies should focus on expanding access to rural and underserved populations, improving care coordination, and promoting low-cost, high-value care, such as preventive services, to achieve better health outcomes for all while reducing health care costs in the longer-term. To work toward these goals, Congress can:

- Expand Medicare Part B coverage to include all recommended vaccines so that seniors can receive them in a physician's office;
- Protect the viability of rural hospitals, which are the only access point in many communities, to ensure patients can receive timely, high-quality care regardless of where they live;
- Remove financial and regulatory barriers that prevent patients from receiving care from their family physician in the most appropriate setting and arrangement for them, including direct primary care;
- Ensure all individuals continue to have access to affordable health care coverage across public and private payers;
- Prevent and reduce the prevalence of chronic disease through policies that promote utilization of preventive care, improved nutrition, and expanded coverage of chronic disease management services;
- Ensure access to appropriate, evidence-based treatment for patients with opioid use disorder (OUD), including from their family physician; and

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- Implement long-term reforms to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and address disparities, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

On behalf of the AAFP, we again congratulate you on your election to Congress and stand ready to partner with you to address the challenges facing our nation's health care system in order to improve the lives of all Americans. For more information, please contact David Tully, Vice President of Government Relations, at dtully@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

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