
On March 10, 2021, Congress passed the latest COVID-19 relief bill, the American Rescue Plan of 2021 (ARP). This massive bill makes several important health-related changes but could unintentionally impose a pay cut for providers by triggering the Statutory Pay-as-you-Go Act of 2010. This law requires that automatic payment cuts be put into place if a statutory action creates a net increase in the deficit unless Congress acts to waive this requirement.

The ARP provides $7.66 billion to state and local public health departments to hire staff and purchase equipment, technology, and other supplies such as vaccines to support public health efforts. The bill provides $100 million for the Medical Reserve Corps, $800 million for the National Health Service Corps, $200 million for the Nurse Corps, and $330 million for teaching hospitals.

ARP provides an additional $8.5 billion to the Provider Relief Fund for eligible rural providers to help pay for healthcare-related expenses and lost revenues attributable to COVID-19. The bill gives $3 billion for block grants to state and local government entities to address mental health and substance use disorders and for behavioral health workforce education and community-based behavioral health services.

The ARP requires state Medicaid programs and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to provide coverage, without cost-sharing, for treatment or prevention of COVID-19 for one year after the end of the public health emergency. ARP also allows CMS to waive restrictions on payment for ambulance services where the patient was not transported to the nearest facility due to the pandemic.

Congress will be considering must-pass legislation relating to the debt limit and fiscal funding later this year, which will provide opportunities for Congress to pass a waiver of the Pay-as-you-go-Act and enactment of popular provisions such as making telehealth expansion permanent. SIR will be actively working to prevent any additional payment cuts to our physicians.

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**Congress to Consider Medicare Sequester Moratorium**

With the American Rescue Act's enactment, Congress's attention now turns to the Medicare sequester moratorium set to expire on March 31. Historically, Congress acts with bipartisan support to prevent broad sequester cuts that harm doctors. The House of Representatives plans to consider legislation this week to extend the Medicare sequester moratorium through the end of the year and waive the PAY-GO scorecard to stop additional sequester cuts. A bipartisan group of senators, led by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), plans to introduce separate legislation to extend the sequester cut moratorium. However, the timeline for Senate action is unknown.

Along with the American Medical Association (AMA), SIR supports extending the Medicare sequester moratorium through the end of the year. According to AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James Madara, "the medical community strongly opposes these broad Medicare cuts and the likely devastating impact they would have on many already distressed physician practices." SIR will continue to monitor and advocate for any legislative solution that delays the Medicare sequester cuts.

**Washington Happenings**

On March 2nd, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce's health subcommittee held a virtual hearing to discuss permanent telehealth expansion. Overall, subcommittee members showed strong support for making the emergency suspension of Medicare's telehealth rules permanent after the public health emergency ends. Subcommittee members on both sides of the aisle praised the proposed access telehealth provides. According to subcommittee chair Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA), "telehealth demonstrates great promise for high quality, innovative care if we create legislation that fits our needs." However, some members did raise concerns about possible utilization when taking challenges, like broadband access, into account.

**Events**

- **SIR Annual Meeting**  
  March 22-26, 2021

- **Voices for IR: Lessons Learned from Advocates Webinar**  
  April 21, 2021, 8-9PM

- **Voices for IR: Learn from a Lobbyist Webinar**  
  June 16, 2021, 8-9PM

- **Voices for IR: Virtual Advocacy Day**  
  June 23-24, 2021

**SIRPAC**

SIRPAC is a political action committee dedicated to raising and contributing money to support key congressional leaders and candidates with pro-IR agendas. All SIRPAC contributions go directly to these candidates. Contributions from non-U.S. citizens are prohibited.