

Senate OKs relief for physicians, medical practices

Late Wednesday, the Senate approved a massive \$2 trillion stimulus and COVID-19 relief package.

As of Thursday afternoon, according to the AMA, provisions of particular interest to physicians and their practices include the following:

- Creation of a new loan product within the Small Business Administration for loans of up to \$10 million to help cover payroll and overhead costs, with expanded loan forgiveness criteria. Physician practices with up to 500 employees may qualify.
- \$100 billion in direct financial support to hospitals, physician practices and other health care providers under the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund. This support is for costs of treating COVID-19 patients, as well as to ease the financial impact on those who lose revenue due to reductions in other services as a result of the pandemic. The exact eligibility criteria and application process is not yet defined, pending implementation.
- Suspension of the 2% Medicare sequester in May through December 2020.
- Limitations on liability for volunteer health care professionals during COVID-19 emergency response.
- A temporary waiver of the face-to-face visit requirement with home dialysis patients.
- Authority for the Secretary of HHS to waive telehealth coverage requirements for new patients during a national emergency. Previous legislation provided flexibility only for established patients seen within the past three years.
- Secretary will also allow for enhanced use of telehealth under Medicare for federally qualified health centers.

Also of interest, the “health extenders” package that was set to expire on May 22 has now been extended to November 30.

House passage is expected on Friday and the president is expected to sign the bill into law.