January 26, 2016

The Honorable Randi Becker
Chair, Washington State Senate Health Care Committee
110 Irv Newhouse Building
PO Box 40402
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chairwoman Becker:

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the Washington Osteopathic Medical Association (WOMA) are writing to express our support for SB 6272. This bill would ensure that primary care providers receive sufficient payment to participate in Medicaid and would in turn, encourage more primary care physicians to provide services to Medicaid recipients. We believe this would ultimately increase access to health care for patients.

The AOA represents more than 123,000 osteopathic physicians (DOs) and osteopathic medical students, promotes public health, encourages scientific research, serves as the primary certifying body for DOs, is the accrediting agency for osteopathic medical schools, and has federal authority to accredit hospitals and other health care facilities. More information on DOs/osteopathic medicine can be found at www.osteopathic.org. WOMA is a professional organization that represents nearly 1,300 DOs providing patient care in Washington. The Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine located in Yakima has an osteopathic medical student enrollment of over 400 students.

Medicaid finances health services for more than 60 million Americans including children, pregnant women, individuals with disabilities, and working Americans otherwise unable to afford insurance or whose jobs do not offer employer-based coverage. Unfortunately, lower Medicaid payment rates create substantial barriers to patient access to health care services.¹

Payment rates for Medicaid services can affect a physician’s ability to accept new Medicaid patients into his or her practice. According to the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC), 22.6% of primary-care physicians have historically been unwilling to add new Medicaid/CHIP patients, which is nearly 10% less than are willing to accept new Medicare patients.²

² Decker, Sandra L., Two-Thirds of Primary Care Physicians Accepted New Medicaid Patients In 2011-12: A Baseline To Measure Future Acceptance Rates, Health Affairs, 32, no.7 (2013): 1183-1187.
A study funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine, found early evidence that increased Medicaid payments for primary care providers, as authorized under the Affordable Care Act, increased primary care appointment availability by 8% without generating longer waiting times.\(^3\)

According to MACPAC, a large body of research has also shown that comparatively low payment rates are a substantial factor affecting primary-care physician participation in Medicaid and access to services for Medicaid beneficiaries.\(^4\) Limited access to physician care leads individuals to seek primary care at hospital emergency rooms.\(^5\) Our goal is to ensure that Medicaid patients have access to a primary-care physician, advancing coordination and continuity of care. Strong evidence demonstrates that sustaining the primary-care payment policy in Medicaid (SSA 1902(a)(13)(C)) is critical to ensuring access to primary care, leading to better quality of care for patients and decreased costs for the states.

Ensuring that physicians receive adequate payment for services provided to Medicaid recipients will increase Medicaid patients’ access to healthcare. Should you need any additional information, please feel free to contact Nicholas Schilligo, MS, Associate Vice President, State Government Affairs, at nschilligo@osteopathic.org or (800) 621-1773, ext. 8185.

Sincerely,

John W. Becher, DO
President, AOA

Scott Fannin, DO
President, WOMA

CC: Boyd R. Buser, DO, AOA President-elect
Joseph A. Giaimo, DO, Chair, AOA Department of Governmental Affairs
Michael K. Murphy, DO, Chair, AOA Bureau of State Government Affairs
Adrienne White-Faines, MPA, AOA Chief Executive Officer
Ray Quintero, Senior Vice President, AOA Public Policy
Nicholas Schilligo, MS, Associate Vice President, AOA State Government Affairs
Kathleen Itter, Executive Director, WOMA


https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=bWFjegFjLmdvLnxvYWtWNwYWN8Z3g6NDJjZGY1YWZkNmVjYjBjMg.