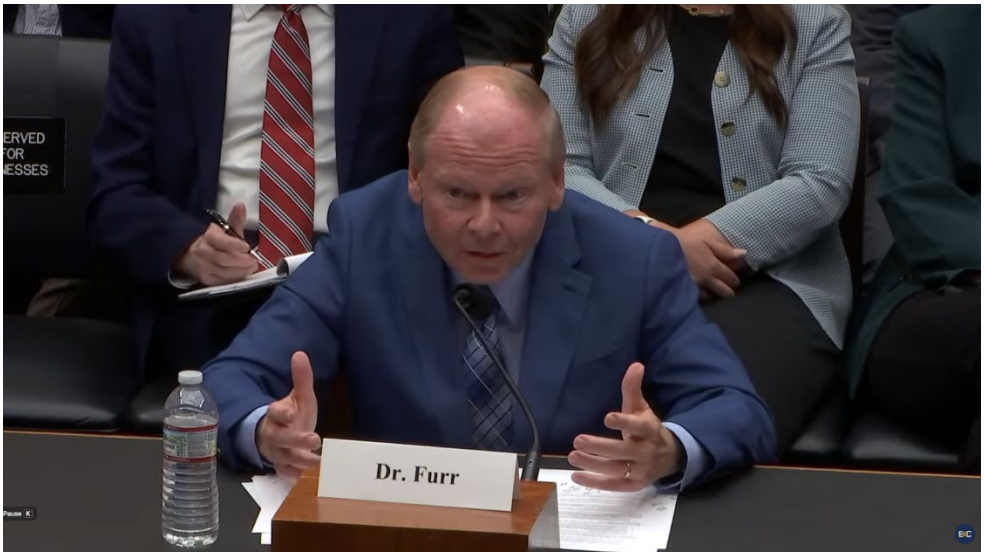
Family Medicine Advocacy Rounds – Issue 47, May 2026

Welcome to Family Medicine Advocacy Rounds — the American Academy of Family Physicians' monthly tip sheet to educate, engage and update you on the latest policy issues affecting family physicians and their patients.

Family Physician Tells Congress It's Time to Reform Medicare Physician Payments



***Why it matters**:* Medicare payments to physicians have not kept up with the rising costs of running a medical practice. Congress must modernize the outdated Medicare physician payment system to better support patient care and strengthen primary care practices. Without congressional action, budget neutrality requirements and the lack of inflation-based payment updates will continue to strain physician practices and threaten patient access to care.

What we're working on: Physician compensation should better reflect the value of prevention, health maintenance, early diagnosis and early treatment. These are core services family physicians provide every day. Yesterday, former AAFP president, Steve Furr, MD, FAAFP, testified before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health for a hearing titled, *Examining the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, MACRA, and Opportunities for Payment Reforms*. Dr. Furr's testimony focused on four key areas to improve Medicare payments to physicians:

- Better recognizing and valuing primary care work within the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, which also shapes many value-based payment models.
- Reforming budget neutrality rules that can create competition between physician specialties and limit CMS's ability to invest across the full range of patient care services.
- Reducing financial barriers for patients by waiving cost-sharing requirements for chronic care management and other primary care services.
- Creating more stable, predictable payment streams for primary care practices so physicians can better tailor care to patients' needs.

Read Dr. Furr's full testimony here.

AAFP Urges DHS to Not Stall on Visas for IMGs

Why it matters: Family medicine relies heavily on international medical graduates (IMGs) to meet patient care needs, but ongoing delays in visa processing are worsening workforce shortages and disrupting care continuity.

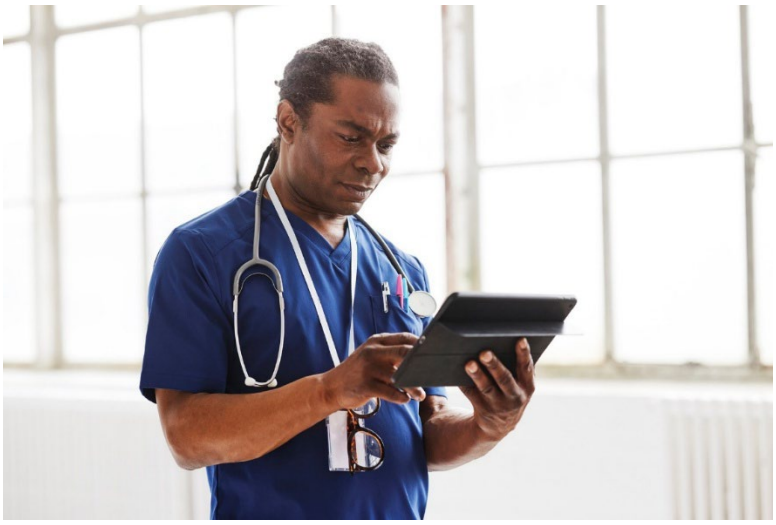
The AAFP was encouraged that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services announced it lifted the hold on physician applications but urges the agency to issue further guidance that details how this reversal will be implemented and for Congress to conduct oversight to ensure family physicians can care for their communities.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP led a coalition letter to the Departments of Homeland Security and State urging expedited processing of visa applications and related immigration adjudications for foreign physicians who are essential to the U.S. physician workforce, particularly in underserved and rural communities.

- We have also endorsed the H-1Bs for Physicians and the Healthcare Workforce Act, legislation that would exempt physicians' sponsoring institutions from the new H-1B $100,000 fee.

Family Physicians Support Legislation to Increase Primary Care Investment



Why it matters: Investing in primary care remains an essential strategy to lower health care costs, keep people out of hospitals, address chronic conditions and prevent disease early. The AAFP endorsed the Prioritizing Primary Care Act (H.R. 8765), introduced by Reps. David Rouzer, Ami Bera, Jen Kiggans and Joe Courtney – four co-chairs of the Primary Care Caucus – which would require all federal health programs to clearly track and report how much money they spend on primary care services. This includes both the total dollars spent and what share of overall health spending goes to primary care.

The bill would also create a federal working group within the Department of Health and Human Services to study how the government can better support primary care. This group would look at ways to increase access to primary care doctors, improve quality of care and encourage more investment in primary care services.

AAFP and SCAN Leaders: Making America Healthy Again Requires More Than a Committee

The government's new Healthcare Advisory Meeting was held on May 18 to discuss policies to improve the U.S. health care system. In a recent op-ed in Fierce Healthcare, AAFP CEO Shawn

Martin and Sachin H. Jain, MD, CEO of SCAN Group and SCAN Health Plan, outlined five bold ideas that challenge both government and industry leaders to rethink what it will actually take to make the country healthier:

1. A call for every sector to look inward and take responsibility for its own role in poor health outcomes
2. A shift from measuring financial performance to measuring what truly matters: health
3. Treating the rebuilding of public trust in science as a national imperative
4. Ensuring technology strengthens—rather than erodes—the human relationships at the core of health care
5. Re-centering primary care as the foundation of prevention and long-term health

Read the full piece here.

AAFP Speaks Out on Student Loans

Why it matters: The AAFP continues to advocate for federal student loan policies that support the physician workforce and strengthen pathways into primary care. Reducing the financial burden of medical education can help more students choose careers in family medicine and other primary care specialties, especially in underserved and rural communities where access to care is often limited. We also remain steadfast in our advocacy efforts to support policies that expand loan repayment and forgiveness opportunities for physicians who commit to serving high-need populations.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP continues to engage with the Department of Education following the release of the RISE final rule, raising concerns about provisions that could restrict access to federal student loans for medical students and residents.

- We are working closely with partners and key stakeholders to better understand the rule's implementation timeline and identify opportunities to reduce disruptions for current and future borrowers before it takes effect on July 1, 2026.
- The AAFP is also highlighting the potential impact on the primary care workforce, particularly concerns that eliminating Graduate PLUS loans and imposing new borrowing limits could make it harder for students from lower-income backgrounds to pursue careers in family medicine.
- In addition, the AAFP supported the bipartisan Congressional Review Act resolution led by Sen. Tim Kaine and Rep. Joe Courtney to overturn a recent rule affecting the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program.
- We remain concerned that the PSLF rule would allow the Department of Education to disqualify certain employers from the program, creating uncertainty for family physicians currently participating in, or considering, the PSLF program.

Family Physicians Urge Congress to Oppose ECAPS

The Ensuring Community Access to Pharmacist Services (ECAPS) Act is seeing renewed movement in Congress. The bill would add pharmacists as eligible Medicare Part B providers for testing and treating conditions such as COVID-19, RSV, strep throat, influenza and future public health emergency-related illnesses. Proposed legislation is also projected to cost Medicare an estimated $2 billion, funding that could instead support primary and preventive care services.

The AAFP continues to express concerns about the potential impacts on care coordination, continuity of care and patient safety for Medicare beneficiaries. We remain committed to working with Congress to instead advance policies that promote nationwide access to high-value, physician-led care, such as by allowing family physicians to be able to administer all recommended vaccines to seniors under Part B.

What We're Reading

- AAFP EVP and CEO Shawn Martin spoke to the *Washington Examiner* about how AI can help doctors, but there must be guardrails. "I still think there's a humanism all about family medicine and primary care, that it's going to be a one-to-one relationship for a long time, hopefully forever," he said.

- The AAFP told *Becker's* that "Physicians and medical trainees are indispensable to the nation's health care infrastructure. We are encouraged that UCSIS has reversed the visa freeze for international medical graduates and look forward to the agency issuing further guidance that details how this reversal will be implemented. As we wrote in our April 8 letter to the Departments of State and Homeland Security, prolonged visa processing delays and indefinite adjudicative holds are forcing physicians to abandon residency programs and leaving already strained communities without access to care."

- Reps. Kim Schrier and John Joyce introduced the bipartisan Strengthening Vaccines for Children Program Act. AAFP president, Sarah C. Nosal, MD, FAAFP, said in a joint

press release, “As a family physician, I see every day how vaccines protect children from serious, preventable diseases. This bill takes important steps to make vaccines more accessible, support the time we spend counseling families, and ensure more children get the care they need. Expanding and supporting immunization programs like Vaccines for Children is one of the most effective ways we can keep our communities healthy.”