Family Medicine Advocacy Rounds – Issue 43, January 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.

New Family Medicine Residency Slots Awarded

Thanks to sustained advocacy from the AAFP, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) awarded 32 new family medicine residency positions across 18 training programs. Expanding family medicine training is critical to addressing physician shortages and improving access to comprehensive, community-based care, which is why the AAFP continues to push for residency slots dedicated specifically to family medicine.

DEA Preserves Telehealth Flexibilities

The AAFP welcomed the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's recent one-year extension (through Dec. 31) of telehealth flexibilities for prescribing controlled substances, which helps protect patient access to care, especially in rural and underserved communities. The AAFP looks forward to continued partnership with the DEA on permanent telehealth policies that support safe prescribing and prioritize established patient-physician relationships.

AAFP Supports Vaccinations for Children

Why it matters: On January 5, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reduced the number of vaccines it recommends for children. Political appointees made these changes without new evidence or data and without input from stakeholders such as the AAFP or the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

The AAFP reasserts that vaccines are essential to protecting children from preventable harms, illness, and death, and decades of data show the benefits of immunization far outweigh any risks. The AAFP's childhood vaccine schedule remains unchanged.

What we're working on:

- The AAFP joined hundreds of health care organizations in urging Congress to conduct oversight and investigate the change to the childhood vaccine schedule.

- The AAFP joined the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and hundreds of other organizations in writing to HHS and the CDC to reaffirm our commitment to a transparent, evidence-based immunization policy process that protects the health of U.S. children.

Family Physicians Weigh in on Public Charge Rule

Why it matters: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has proposed rolling back the 2022 Public Charge rule, a move that could once again allow immigration officials to consider a broader range of public benefits, such as Medicaid, CHIP and SNAP, when deciding whether someone can enter the U.S. or adjust their immigration status. If finalized, the proposal would increase uncertainty for immigrant families and could discourage people from seeking needed health care.

What we're working on:

- In a comment letter, the AAFP urged DHS to exclude non-cash benefits such as Medicaid and CHIP from public charge determinations and to clarify that any changes in the policy, whether through regulation or guidance, will be forward-looking only.

- In a joint letter to DHS, the AAFP and other health organizations warned that limiting access to care and creating instability in the immigration system harm public health, place added financial and operational strain on medical practices and negatively affect the U.S. physician workforce.

- The letters urged DHS not to move forward with the proposal and instead support policies that expand access to affordable, high-quality care for all patients.

AAFP Continues to Advocate for Medicare Payment Reform

As Congress considers changes to Medicare physician payment, the AAFP is urging lawmakers to advance reforms that strengthen primary care and protect seniors' access to timely, high-quality care.

- Through recent advocacy, including engagement around a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing, the AAFP emphasized the need to modernize the Medicare physician fee schedule by fixing budget neutrality, investing more in primary care and establishing annual inflation-indexed updates.

- The AAFP also called for waiving Medicare Part B cost-sharing for primary care services to encourage use of high-value, low-cost care; expanding value-based payment models that provide practices with greater flexibility and resources; and ensuring Part B coverage of all recommended vaccines so patients can receive immunizations directly from their family physician.

- In addition, the AAFP responded to a bipartisan Doctors Caucus RFI on MACRA reform, urging for increased Medicare investment in primary care, including establishing a statutory floor for primary care spending and giving the CMS Innovation Center greater flexibility in evaluating primary care models to better support continuous, coordinated care.

What We're Reading

- AAFP EVP and CEO Shawn Martin spoke to Chief Healthcare Executive about how insurers must double down on their promise to decrease prior authorization, which harms patient care.

- AAFP President Sarah Nosal, MD, FAAFP, spoke to TechTarget about five health care trends on the rise in 2026, including community-based partnerships.

- AAFP Board Chair Jen Brull, MD, FAAFP, spoke to MedCity News on how Congress can address administrative burden.