

***Blastfax!***

**Georgia AAP Legislative Alert...**

**Campaign for Medicaid-Medicare Parity Begins, Your Action Requested!**

The Georgia Legislature has now convened and increasing the Medicaid payments to physician practices is the #1 Georgia AAP priority this session.

Last year we got \$23M dollars added to the Medicaid budget to increase 6 codes to Medicare levels. That was a great win, and now we're ready for Round 2. Except for what we gained last year, the state **has not increased Medicaid payment rates in 16 years**. We know such poor reimbursement affects access to care negatively, and deprives many children of a medical home. We are joined in this coalition effort by the Georgia societies of OB's, FP's, IM's and DO's.

**We will need the help of all Georgia AAP members** to communicate the importance of this issues. The Legislature is just starting to take up the FY 2017 budget, so now is the time to act.

1. **Find out who your state representative and state senator is, if you do not know.** Look up both for your home address and your practice address, if different. You can do this on the Georgia AAP website. ([www.gaaap.org](http://www.gaaap.org))
2. The budget is now in the House Appropriations Committee, so **contact your State Representative this week or early next. Thank them** for the funds added last year but let them know we need to continue to address chronically low reimbursement of physician practices in Medicaid. A roster of both the **House & Senate Appropriations Medicaid sub-committees** is on the Legislative page of the Georgia AAP website. If you live or practice in one of their districts, **it is ESPECIALLY important for you to contact them now.** The budget is moving fast & making contact NOW is critical!
3. Phone calls are ideal, even if you leave a message.
4. We have included a **Sample Letter** to work from if you Email. Don't merely copy it verbatim. Use your own "voice." Tell your story – it's powerful.
5. We have also included a Fact Sheet which we are using with legislators, & has Talking Points.
6. Please notify the Georgia AAP office of responses you get from your representatives.
7. We did a great job last year and many legislators now realize the value of paying Medicare rates in Medicaid. Watch for our Blast Emails and Faxes. For more information, call the Georgia AAP office at 404-881-5091 or email: [jrice@gaaap.org](mailto:jrice@gaaap.org). Thank you.

***Evelyn Johnson, MD***  
President

***Melinda Willingham, MD***  
Legislative Committee Chair

***Hugo Scornik, MD***  
Medicaid Task Force Chair

***(This Fact Sheet is being distributed to Legislators by Georgia AAP & our Coalition Partners at the Capitol)***

**PATIENT-CENTERED PHYSICIANS COALITION OF GEORGIA**

**Low Medicaid Payment Rates: A Continuing Problem for the Health of Georgia Citizens & Our Business Climate**

The Patient-Centered Physicians Coalition of Georgia is comprised of the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians; Georgia Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics; Georgia Chapter-American College of Physicians (Internal Medicine); Georgia Osteopathic Medical Association; and Georgia OB-Gyn Society. Comprised of more than 9,000 physicians, the Coalition represents the primary care and OB-Gyn specialties who provide the overwhelming majority of medical care to Medicaid patients in Georgia.

- The Issue: With the exception of the 12 services mentioned below that saw reimbursement rate increases in the FY 2016 budget, **Medicaid payment rates to physicians have not been increased by the state in 15 years.**
- Our Coalition **requests that the General Assembly add \$26.5M in the FY 2017 DCH budget to increase payment levels for 28 service codes to Medicare levels.** This would bring Georgia Medicaid rates to Medicare parity on about two-thirds of the services which primary care physicians provide.
- On average, the Georgia Medicaid program currently pays only **about 65% of what Medicare pays** for the same physician services and only about **50% of what regular commercial insurance pays.** (See chart below.)

*Below are 5 typical services performed by primary care and OB/Gyn physicians and the reimbursement rates paid to these practices for the same service by Georgia Medicaid, Medicare, and a typical commercial insurance plan.*

Code	Service	Georgia Medicaid	Medicare	Commercial Insurance
99214	Sick visit, Office, Established Patient	\$62.71	\$108.19	\$134.50
99203	Sick visit, Office, New Patient	\$76.53	\$107.72	\$129.75
99218	Initial Observation Care, In hospital	\$60.29	\$98.12	\$116.61
99460	Normal Newborn Exam, In hospital	\$64.90	\$90.21	\$103.12
90460	Vaccine Administration, 0-18 years	\$10.00	\$25.25	\$31.50

- Last year, the General Assembly added \$23M in new state funds in the FY 2016 DCH budget **to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates on 12 services** which primary care and OB/Gyn physicians provide. We were very appreciative of this important action.

*The current low Medicaid reimbursement rates have a detrimental impact on primary care physician practices and the citizens they serve:*

- **Reduce access to care for patients:** Medicaid payment directly impacts a physician's participation in the Medicaid program, and is a key factor in ensuring access to care for Medicaid patients. Low Medicaid payment rates force physicians to make the difficult decisions to limit or stop seeing Medicaid patients.
- **Weakens our efforts to stabilize Rural Health in Georgia:** Physicians practicing in rural Georgia are disproportionately impacted by low Medicaid reimbursement rates because they generally serve a larger percentage of Medicaid patients in their practices —children, pregnant women and other fragile adults. Physicians must have adequate payment in order to maintain a viable practice. A strong healthcare system is vital to a community's viability and its capacity for economic growth. And last year, **three more obstetric & nursery hospital units closed in our state (bringing the total to 35 closures)** evidence that access to care in rural Georgia is continuing to diminish.
- **Hurts Georgia's ability to retain an adequate physician workforce:** Strong physician practices are fundamental for the health systems in our communities, especially in non-metro areas. Georgia already has **a shortage of Primary Care physicians in 75% of its counties** (119 out of 159). Additionally, low Medicaid reimbursement rates discourage medical school graduates from choosing primary care specialties and act as a deterrent to new doctors completing their residency training to remain in Georgia to practice.
- Physician practices, in addition to being critical to the community's healthcare system are **also vital contributors to the area's economy:** The AMA reported last year that Primary Care physicians' practices are significant economic engines in Georgia. The study found that these practices: **Supported 62,000 jobs in Georgia** and provided over \$4.3 billion in wages and benefits to their employees.

**American Academy of Pediatrics**

February 3, 2016

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**Sample Email message  
to your State Senator or State Representative**

*Please modify to fit your circumstances and add “your voice.” Above all, be respectful in tone. First, call their office and leave a message as to who you are and that you are sending the Rep. or Senator an Email message regarding the Medicaid payment budget item for physician services.*

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_ (or Rep. \_\_\_\_\_)

I am a pediatrician who has practiced for xx years at Sunnyside Pediatrics and live in your district. (Or I am a pediatrician whose practice, Sunnyside Pediatrics, is located in your district.)

My practice serves both children with commercial insurance and those children on Medicaid & Peachcare. Routine medical care for children—in their “medical home—their regular doctor’s office is so important for children. Preventive care and regular check-ups ensure that the child remains healthy and that any condition or disease is diagnosed early and the child can receive the needed treatment.

However, my (*our practice’s*) ability to continue to provide that care to the children in our area is now threatened by chronically low reimbursement from Medicaid. Here in Georgia, Medicaid pays only 65% of what Medicare pays, for the care of a senior citizen. And for the services which I provide for my privately insured patients, it pays only about 50% of that.

Medicaid payments directly impact our practice’s participation in the Medicaid program and this is a key factor in ensuring that these children—who make of nearly 70% of the Medicaid patient population—get the care they need.

In my practice we have discussed....(*options re dealing with poor Medicaid payments, closing to Medicaid patients, reducing Medicaid volume, postponement of expansion plans, closing satellite offices, etc.*)

I urge you to support measures in the Appropriations process to increase Medicaid reimbursement to practices who treat these children. This is especially important in our area, where we have a shortage of pediatricians and other primary care doctors like family medicine and OB/Gyn’s. (*Use this if appropriate and accurate.*) Thank you.

Sincerely,

John Smith, MD  
Sunnyside Pediatrics  
Address and city and phone & email