

## Memorandum

To: SNAP Members  
From: SNAP Staff  
Date: March 20, 2020  
Subject: Senate COVID-19 stimulus bill

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Last night Senate Republican leaders presented a COVID-19 stimulus bill that would spend approximately \$1 trillion in the coming months with two objectives: primarily to stimulate an economy that is being ravaged by COVID-19 and secondarily, as the bill is currently envisioned, to fight COVID-19 itself.

### Major Health Care Provisions

The following is an overview of the proposal's major health care provisions.

#### *Medicare*

- A 15 percent bonus in Medicare payments for care provided to COVID-19 patients.
- Lifting the Medicare sequester that reduced Medicare payments two percent from May 1 through the end of 2020.
- \$1.32 billion for community health centers.
- A number of telehealth-related provisions, including:
  - Permitting high-deductible health plans with health savings accounts to cover telehealth before patients reach their deductibles.
  - Eliminating the provision in an earlier to COVID-19 bill that limited the ability of providers to employ telehealth with patients they had not already been serving for at least three years.
  - Permitting federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and rural health clinics to provide telehealth services at rates similar to those in the Medicare physician fee schedule.
  - Eliminating the current requirement that nephrologists conduct some of the periodic evaluations of their home dialysis patients face-to-face.
- Permitting patients to use health savings account and flexible spending accounts to purchase over-the-counter medical products without a prescription from their doctor.
- Permitting physician assistants and nurse practitioners to order home health services.
- Eliminating the scheduled reduction of Medicare payments for durable medical equipment.



- Establishing a separate Medicare payment to hospitals for administering qualified antibiotic and antifungal treatments to patients with serious or life-threatening infections to help prevent the spread of those infections.

### *Medicaid*

- Permitting state Medicaid programs to pay for programs to help train and consult with providers caring for COVID-19 patients in rural and underserved areas.
- Permitting state Medicaid programs to pay for direct support professionals trained to assist with activities of daily living for disabled individuals so such patients can be sent home from hospitals, thereby freeing hospital beds.

### *Others*

- The bill clarifies that COVID-19 tests are to be covered by private insurers at no cost to their members.
- It calls for insurers to pay for COVID-19 tests either the rate in their contract with the provider or, in the absence of a contract, the cash price posted by the provider.
- Provides for free COVID-19 vaccines when such vaccines are approved and become available.

## **Economic Stimulus Provisions**

The major categories of spending in this bill are:

- Approximately \$500 billion for direct payments for most individual taxpayers.
- \$300 billion for loans of up to \$10 million to small businesses.
- \$50 billion in loans and guarantees for passenger airlines and another \$8 billion for cargo air carriers.
- \$150 billion for other “eligible businesses,” the types of businesses not yet specified but with speculation that this money is for hotel companies, cruise lines, and others, with the Treasury Department exercising considerable discretion over the distribution of this money.

## **What’s Next?**

As noted, this proposal was negotiated between Senate Republicans and the White House. Congressional Democrats have not yet been consulted and there already are published reports that they disagree with aspects of the proposed legislation. These disagreements still need to be negotiated and senators say they are prepared to work through the weekend to finalize a bill.

## **Conclusion**

Please let us know if you have any questions.

