

AMA PUSHES MEDICARE PAYMENT REVISIONS

The American Medical Association (AMA) has support from more than 100 lawmakers for long-term Medicare physician payment reform, while specialists and family physicians clash over a new evaluation and management code for complex patients that contributed to the overall drop in CMS' proposed 2024 conversion factor. But lobbyists don't expect long-term physician payment reform to move until next year or beyond, and are looking at various potential shorter-term payment relief options.

Some lobbyists believe that with doctors facing a proposed 3.3% payment cut, including a small patch for 2024 that was passed at the end of last year, lawmakers will have to step in with some relief. But others believe an extension of the alternative payment model bonus could have a better shot of being included in year-end legislation than an overall payment bump.

Lobbyists have become skeptical that long-term physician payment reform could move. Many believe Congress will have neither the time nor the money to tackle longer-term reforms before the end of the year, especially as physicians have been pushing for an annual provider payment increase tied to the Medicare Economic Index and that could be pricey.

When CMS proposed a 3.3% decrease to the conversion factor, the agency pointed to the lower, 1.25% mitigation factor from Congress and changes to evaluation and management pay, including the implementation of the add-on code for complex evaluation and management services, as driving forces behind its calculations. The add-on code has earned support from the American Academy of Family Physicians, and American College of Physicians, while surgical organizations have opposed its implementation.

If implemented, this code will result in increased payments for providers that use the add-on code at the same time penalizing all physicians due to a reduction in the Medicare conversion factor that will be required to maintain budget neutrality under the MPFS.