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Coronavirus Positive Gains & Successes

COVID-19 has flipped our world upside down. As your advocate, the Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED) hasn't missed a beat in working to keep our membership on target as your ability to perform your "Art of Medicine" changed. One day we were in the office, the next we were working safely at home.

PAMED's advocacy, education, and customer service continue on behalf of physicians, practices, and patients.

PAMED was at the forefront of the pandemic and is cited as one of the most trusted COVID-19 resources in Pennsylvania. When the flow of news about COVID-19 threatened to become overwhelming, we stepped in to share the information that was most relevant to you:

- **PAMED COVID-19 Resource Center website:** More than 60,000 people have visited our COVID-19 Resource Center website, first launched in February.
- **Email and Text Communication:** In addition to receiving our weekly *Dose* e-newsletters, our members can sign up for our COVID-19 Briefing for news delivered by text or email. We experienced a high email open rate in the 40 percent range during Pennsylvania's spike in cases in April.
- **PAMED's Knowledge Center:** Our Knowledge Center remains open from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Judy, Kathy, and Norma are ready to help answer your questions or connect you with staff that can help. You can connect with them by dialing 800-228-7823 or emailing KnowledgeCenter@pamedsoc.org. We have offered personalized assistance by answering more than 600 calls from our members.
- **Webinars and Education:** Two member-only webinars with Pa. Health Secretary Rachel Levine, MD, and Infectious Disease Specialist Raghavendra Tirupathi, MD were hosted to give members direct access to experts. Additionally, links to free NEJM COVID treatment simulations added to the COVID webpage.
- **Statewide Physician and Practice Survey:** PAMED completed a state-wide survey in collaboration with MedChi (Maryland's State Medical Society). The survey asked physicians how COVID-19 is and will continue to impact physician practices. The survey data is used to guide PAMED's advocacy efforts and the creation/provision of new educational resources. 986 PAMED members raised their voice to share their COVID-19 challenges.

Work in each of our core areas of focus (Advocate, Educate, Navigate) are listed below.

Advocate

Advocating for our physician members continues, although we can't always be at the Capitol in person as we were prior to the pandemic. We have been working closely with legislators, state agencies like the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and others to ensure that the physician voice is heard.

Here's a look at some of the successes.

Success!

Pennsylvania has waived certain administrative requirements for GMTs during the COVID-19 emergency.

PAMED requested expedited processing of licensure applications for physicians.

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Current GMT licensees are encouraged to apply for an interim limited license, which will allow the GMT to practice outside of their residency program. Additionally, the State Board of Medicine and Department of State have also made several allowances to enable GMTs in their final PGY year to obtain an unrestricted license sooner.

Success!

Physician offices can resume non-urgent procedures if they meet requirements in new Pa. guidance.

Pennsylvania issued guidance for hospitals and ambulatory surgical facilities to resume non-urgent procedures on April 27. PAMED urged the state to release similar guidance for physician practices.

On May 9, Pennsylvania released guidance for health care practitioners in settings such as physician offices. Providers may resume non-urgent and elective care in addition to providing urgent and emergency care, only when appropriate personal protective equipment is available and telemedicine is not clinically sufficient.

Success!

Gov. Wolf issued an executive order granting medical liability immunity to some physicians who treat COVID-19 patients.

Physicians and other health care providers are on the front lines of fighting COVID-19, and in doing so, risking their lives and the lives of their family members in the process. Why should we expose them to the additional risk of a lawsuit while they are risking their lives in this pressing emergency?

On May 6, 2020, Gov. Wolf issued an executive order granting medical liability to some physicians who treat COVID-19 patients. PAMED acknowledges this as a good first step toward protecting the physicians of Pennsylvania. However, we are frustrated that his executive order did not cover practitioners in outpatient settings. [Learn more about the order and get a list of facilities/settings covered under the order here.](#)

PAMED has urged the governor to expand the order to include any setting in which physicians see COVID-19 patients. We also support SB 1239, a state bill that would expand lawsuit abuse protections for practitioners caring for COVID-19 patients.

The governor's executive order issued on May 6 also relaxed scope of practice regulations for CRNAs. On May 7, the Pennsylvania Society of Anesthesiologists sent a letter to Gov. Wolf and Sec. of Health Dr. Rachel Levine expressing concern over the relaxation of scope of practice regulations. PAMED and POMA also signed onto the letter. [Read the letter](#)

Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, PAMED has been strongly advocating with the governor's office and legislators for medical liability immunity for health care providers involved in treating COVID-19 patients. Our actions include [this letter](#) sent on April 14 to the governor, urging him to issue an executive order on medical liability immunity. On April 24, 2020, PAMED led a coalition of more than 30 state medical specialty societies and Pa. county medical societies in issuing a medical liability statement to Gov. Wolf. [Read the full statement.](#)

Success!

Many insurers – including Medicare - have expanded telehealth coverage and reimbursement during the COVID-19 emergency.

Starting March 1, 2020, and for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, Medicare is paying for services furnished to beneficiaries in all areas of the country in all settings. It will also reimburse for telephone services in line with traditional office visits throughout the public health emergency. Many other health insurers have also updated their telehealth policies in response to the crisis.

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We believe that insurers should reimburse for telehealth services and at the same rate as in-person services. In addition, we continue to monitor the potential changes insurers may try to bring forth to set end-dates for telehealth reimbursement.

To assist physicians during this challenging time, PAMED has created a telehealth reference sheet that offers details on HIPAA, coding, and telehealth policies for Pa. insurers. In response to the ongoing changes in telehealth policies, PAMED updates the reference sheet on a regular basis.

For information about how to provide telehealth to your patients, please visit [PAMED's telehealth resource page](#).

Success

Retired physicians may return to work.

PAMED requested that the Department of State, Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs allow active-retired physicians be temporarily permitted to return to active unrestricted status and that all requirements that typically must be fulfilled by an applicant seeking to return to active practice be waived. We also asked for waivers with regard to volunteering and continuing medical education requirements. [Learn more about how to return to work.](#)

Success!

Governor Wolf creates PPE portal.

PAMED asked Gov. Wolf to direct funding to purchase PPEs for practices and facilities that need it. Gov. Wolf took a good first step to addressing this crisis by creating the Critical Medical Supplies Procurement Portal to source the most needed medical supplies. We realize that this portal was a step in the right direction, but it is not a perfect solution all of our members. PAMED continues to advocate for PPE for our member practices outside of the hospital and large health systems. Information about the procurement portal can be found [here](#).

On April 20, PAMED sent a letter to Gov. Wolf to ask that a percentage of the available PPE stockpile be apportioned to providers who are providing life sustaining care in private practices. To date, we have not received a response. [Read the letter.](#)

Success! Governor Wolf announced the COVID-19 Working Capital Access Program.

PAMED asked that the state provide financial relief for medical practices who are overwhelmed with significantly increased costs and substantially reduced revenue, in order to avoid closure. While not nearly enough, Gov. Wolf did provide \$60 million in funding through the COVID-19 Working Capital Access Program.

Find details on loan opportunities in the “Business Resources and Loan Opportunities” section of [PAMED's coronavirus resource page](#).

Educate

Updates from the CDC and Pa. Department of Health

We share new resources and updates from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), and the Pennsylvania Health Alert Network (PA-HAN) frequently.

Here's a look at the information currently featured on PAMED's COVID-19 Resource Center:

- [CDC Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus Resources for Health Care Professionals](#)

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- [COVID-19 Data for Pennsylvania](#)
- [COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard for Pennsylvania](#)
- [Pa. Secretary of Health Expanded Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings](#)
- [Pennsylvania COVID-19 Information for Travelers](#) – DOH’s COVID-19 Information for Travelers webpage recommends that if you travel, or plan to travel, to an area where there are high amounts of COVID-19 cases it is recommended that you stay at home for 14 days upon return to Pennsylvania. Additionally, this webpage includes the current list of states for which, if an individual is returning to Pennsylvania after returning from travel to one of those states, that individual will need to quarantine for 14 days upon return. Physicians and practices with specific questions about the quarantine recommendations should refer to their human resources policies or contact their legal counsel.

Non-Emergent Surgeries & Procedures Guidelines

- [DOH guidance for health care providers on resuming non-urgent procedures](#) (applicable for all health care provider settings except hospitals, ASFs, and dental practices)
- [DOH guidance for hospitals](#)
- [DOH guidance for ambulatory surgical facilities](#)

Health Alert Network Updates

Many of physician questions will be answered as they become available through the Health Alert Networks below. The HAN updates will be sent to your email in real time and take a very short time to sign up for. All health care professionals are strongly encouraged to sign up for these notices.

- View CDC Health Alert Network Updates
[Sign up for CDC Health Alert Network Updates](#)
- View PA Health Alert Network Advisories
[Sign up for PA Health Alert Network Advisories](#)
- View Philadelphia Dept. of Public Health Health Alert Network Messages
[Sign up for PDPH Health Alert Network messages](#)

Testing Guidance

PAMED members receive testing guidance information as it is released.

- [American Medical Association's Considerations for Physicians Ordering SARS-CoV-2 PCR Diagnostic Testing](#)
- [American Medical Association's Considerations for the General Public Seeking SARS-CoV-2 PCR Diagnostic Testing](#)
- [Pa. Department of Health Alert on Laboratory Testing Comparison](#) (Issued 5/06/2020) - In this alert, DOH shared the CLIA laboratory testing comparison, available via CMS [here](#).
- [CDC Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for COVID-19](#)

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- [CDC Overview of Testing for SARS-CoV-2](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing Sites in Pennsylvania](#)
- [Pa. Department of Health Testing and Management Guidance for Patients after Exposure to COVID-19](#)
- [Pa. Department of Health Guidance on Point of Care Antigen Test Use & Interpretation](#)
- [Pa. Department of Health Guidance on Reporting Point of Care Test Results](#)
- [Food and Drug Administration FAQs on COVID-19 Testing](#) (Includes information on manufacturers distributing diagnostic and serology tests)

Best Practices for Reopening a Medical Practice

Members receive guidance for reopening practices. We share recommendations from the Pa. Department of Health, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and OSHA. And, we share what practices need to know about financial, staffing, and safety considerations. Physicians and practices can also track their progress on reopening with PAMED's handy Medical Practice Reopening Checklist.

The comprehensive resource page can be found at www.pamedsoc.org/reopen.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also offers guidance on business reopening, such as:

- [Gov. Wolf's Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses Maintaining In-Person Operations](#)
- [COVID-19 Safety Procedures for Businesses](#) (Businesses maintaining in-person operations are required to prominently display this information and notice. Find a [Spanish-language version of the notice here.](#))

Navigate

PPE Resources

Our COVID-19 Resource Center's PPE section also includes links to the latest state guidance and announcements on PPE and universal masking, PPE tracking tools, and information on other organizations trying to help practices and health care systems obtain PPE.

Business Resources & Loan Opportunities

PAMED's COVID-19 Resource Center shares information on state and federal relief funding and grant/loan opportunities:

Guidance on CARES Act Provider Relief

The bipartisan CARES Act provides \$100 billion in relief funds to hospitals and other health care providers. Beginning April 10, 2020, \$30 billion was distributed with payments arriving via direct deposit. All facilities and providers that received Medicare fee-for-service reimbursements in 2019 are eligible for this initial distribution. The CARES Act provider relief funds are payments, not loans, to health care providers, and will not need to be repaid.

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Distribution of the remaining \$20 billion of the general distribution to providers began on April 24. A portion of providers will automatically be sent an advance payment based off the revenue data they submit in CMS cost reports. Providers without adequate cost report data on file were required to submit their revenue information. Get details on all CARES Act provider relief funding at hhs.gov/providerrelief and check out the updates below:

- **Phase 3 Funding opportunity:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced \$20 billion dollars in Phase 3 Provider Relief funding will be available. Applications will be accepted from Oct. 5 through Nov. 6. [Get details in this HHS press release.](#)
- **Reporting Requirements:** Those who received one or more CARES Act Provider Relief Fund payments exceeding \$10,000 in total are required to report spending information. HHS has shared a notice on the reporting requirements. HHS says a reporting system will be available in early 2021. [Read PAMED's Quick Consult fact sheet on reporting requirements and auditing.](#)

Business Resources & Loan Opportunities

- [The Glatfelter Agency Resources for Employers on Navigating Human Resources Issues Related to COVID-19](#) - Includes an HR Toolkit, FMLA guidance, Workers' Compensation changes, and more.
- [Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#) - The deadline to apply for a PPP loan was Aug. 8, 2020. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) now offers a simplified loan forgiveness application process for PPP loans of \$50,000 or less – Learn more [here](#).
- [CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Options](#) - The SBA provides more information on these four temporary coronavirus relief funding options: Paycheck Protection Program; EIDL Loan Advance; SBA Express Bridge Loans; and SBA Debt Relief.
- [COVID-19 Business Resources](#) (Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development) – DCED offers working capital loans that could be of assistance to businesses impacted by COVID-19. Resources and information will be posted to DCED's webpage as they become available.
- [American Medical Association Physician Practice Relief Guide](#)
- [Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry: Coronavirus Resources for Businesses](#)
- [COVID-19 Small Business Guidance & Loan Resources](#) (U.S. Small Business Administration)
- [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Coronavirus Resources for Businesses](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division guidance on the federal Family First Coronavirus Response Act
 - [Q&A](#)
 - [Fact Sheet for Employers](#)
 - [Fact Sheet for Employees](#)
- [COVID-19 and Unemployment Compensation: FAQs](#) (Pa. Office of Unemployment Compensation)
- [Information for Pennsylvania Employees Impacted by COVID-19](#) (Pa. Office of Unemployment Compensation)
- [Are Insurance Premium Deferrals Available during COVID-19 Emergency?](#) (PAMED)

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OSHA Guidance for Businesses

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers guidance on how to maintain operations in a pandemic. [View OSHA Guidance.](#)

NORCAL Group COVID-19 Resources for Businesses

NORCAL group, which includes NORCAL mutual insurance company, offers practical resources for health care professionals and business on topics like human resources and maintaining health care operations. Get it at www.norcal-group.com/pandemic.

Regulatory & Legal Guidance

COVID-19 Legal FAQs Video Series

Caring for patients with COVID-19 requires physicians to navigate a new set of challenges as they work to provide treatment for a disease about which there are still many unknowns. In addition to these clinical challenges, doctors are facing new issues related to workplace and patient safety, medical liability, HIPAA requirements, and employment laws and regulations.

PAMED worked with attorneys Tanya Leshko and Anthony Andrisano, Jr., attorneys with the Harrisburg, Pa. office of the [law firm Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney](#), to get answers to physicians' frequently asked legal questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[View the members-only videos.](#)

Changes to Regulations & Licensing

Many temporary regulatory and licensing changes were made in response COVID-19 pandemic. PAMED shares links and resources on changes at the federal level, including [waivers and flexibilities](#) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The commonwealth of Pennsylvania has also taken numerous actions concerning health care practitioner licensure requirements during the COVID-19 emergency. We break down those requirements and share what physicians need to know. [Get details here.](#)

Helping Physicians with Stress and Trauma Related to COVID-19

Members experiencing COVID-19- related stress/trauma from can find help and resources.

[Headspace](#) is now the exclusive meditation, mindfulness, and sleep provider for PAMED. Our members get one year of membership free to feel happier, less stressed, and build coping skills to improve resilience anytime you need it. (Requires PAMED login)

The Foundation of the Pennsylvania Medical Society provides outreach and support directly related to coping through the COVID-19 pandemic [here](#). In addition, education is being created to help individuals identify when fatigue, burnout and exhaustion moves to a deeper clinical concern including PTSD due to the stress from the pandemic.