



August 4, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to share our support for several provisions in the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, legislation recently unveiled that makes sweeping and historic investments in this nation's infrastructure. We applaud provisions that would improve public health specifically to ensure all Americans have access to safe drinking water, broadband services that provide vital access to telehealth services, as well as investment in clean energy to reverse the negative health effects associated with climate change. This effort by Congress is long overdue and ACP appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on specific aspects of the legislation where the College has established policy, as outlined below. We do have significant concerns about extension of a mandatory sequester that would be used to help pay for this legislation, which would result in harmful cuts to Medicare physician payments at a time when access to primary care is so vital.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Internal medicine specialists treat many of the patients at greatest risk from COVID-19, including the elderly and patients with pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.

In 2018, ACP released a position paper [Addressing Social Determinants to Improve Patient Care and Promote Health Equity](#), that shows how where a person is born and the social conditions they are born into can affect their risk factors for premature death and life expectancy. The historic investments, as included in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, to ensure safe drinking water and access to high-speed internet, are all key factors to reduce health inequalities associated with social determinants of health, which are defined as the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.ⁱ The investments in this legislation provide positive steps to promote health equity and level the playing field to improve the health outcomes of our citizens no matter where they live.

Safe Drinking Water

ACP supports provisions in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* to upgrade our water infrastructure to ensure that all Americans have access to safe drinking water through a \$55 billion investment that will replace all of the nation's lead pipes and service lines. We know that consequences of lead ingestion can be serious and the consequences are sometimes irreversible. An example of this water crisis is found in Flint Michigan, a predominantly African American city, where 41 percent of residents live below the federal poverty level.ⁱⁱ In 2014, the state of Michigan authorized switching the source of tap water for the approximately 99,000 residents of Flint from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to the Flint River. The Flint Water Treatment Plant did not use corrosion control, resulting in increased lead contamination in the water supply. After several parents and community health care workers heard about elevated levels of lead and noticed health problems affecting citizens after the switch, testing concluded that had increased among children in the city.ⁱⁱⁱ

High-Speed Internet

We are also pleased that this legislation provides \$65 billion to upgrade our broadband infrastructure to ensure that every American has access to a reliable high-speed internet. This investment is key to eliminating the digital divide, the gap between those who have access to technology or the Internet and those who do not, typically on the basis of higher versus lower socioeconomic status.^{iv} The American Medical Informatics Association has stated that it “believe[s] that access to broadband is, or will soon become, a social determinant of health.”^v Lacking access to reliable and affordable Internet or mobile service limits not only a person's ability to utilize technology for health-related purposes but also their ability to access other important services, such as emergency assistance or employment opportunities. There is an increased emphasis on integrating technology into medical care, and lack of reliable Internet access can hinder a person's ability to access medical portals or electronic health records (EHRs).

As noted in another recent study, health equity in medicine is also a real issue and there are disparities in access to telehealth technology. For those in rural and underserved communities, the nearest clinic may be hours away. Unfortunately, rural communities also suffer from more limited access to broadband internet, which restricted the ability of many in rural communities to access telemedicine pre-pandemic. Additionally, research shows that Black and Hispanic Americans own laptops at lower rates than White Americans, further dividing pre-pandemic access to telemedicine.^{vi}

In March, President Biden signed the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) into law, which included an historic \$100 billion investment to help bring affordable, high-speed broadband to all communities, a vital component in the effort to expand telehealth. ACP supports the ongoing commitment of federal funds to enhance the broadband infrastructure needed to support telehealth activities. Equitable access to broadband internet is critical to the promotion of health equity and quality of care outcomes through telehealth.

Power Infrastructure

ACP supports the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* investment of \$73 billion to upgrade our aging electric grid. It upgrades our power infrastructure by building thousands of miles of new, resilient transmission lines to facilitate the expansion of renewable energy. It creates a new Grid Deployment Authority, invests in research and development for advanced transmission and electricity distribution technologies, and promotes smart grid technologies that deliver flexibility and resilience. This investment is consistent with our policy that supports the investment in clean energy to mitigate the increased rate of disease, injuries and premature deaths associated with climate change. ACP supported the Clean Power Plan that was finalized by the Obama Administration in 2015 which seeks to reduce power plant carbon emissions by 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. The EPA has touted the environmental and public health co-benefits of adopting the plan's standards, estimating the prevention of up to 3,600 premature deaths, 90,000 asthma attacks, and 300,000 missed work and school days.^{vii} Although these steps are important, addressing climate change will require a concerted effort by government; the business community; public health professionals; the health care, agricultural, and energy sectors; environmental stakeholders; and others throughout the global community.

Offsets

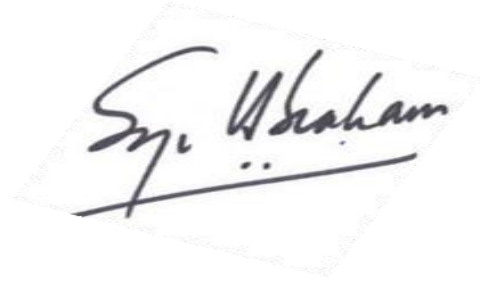
ACP remains concerned that \$8.7 billion from extending mandatory Medicare sequestration through 2031 would be used to partially offset the costs associated with the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. ACP and many other frontline health care organizations continue to urge Congress to prevent a two percent Medicare sequester cut, currently scheduled to be imposed on physicians on January 1 of next year. In addition to the mandatory sequester, additional Medicare cuts will be imposed on physicians through a federal law known as PAYGO- that would reduce payments on physicians up to four percent at the end of this year. **As internal medicine physicians continue to struggle with the financial challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these Medicare cuts would deal a devastating blow to their ability to deliver high quality care to their patients and we urge Congress to act before the end of CY 2021 to prevent scheduled cuts for physician services, including primary care, resulting from budget sequestration and PAYGO budget rules.**

Conclusion

ACP appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on select aspects of this bipartisan infrastructure legislation that would have real health implications on millions of Americans. We applaud those who have worked together to promote policies to improve patients' health through policies in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* that will ensure safe drinking water and access to high-speed internet for all Americans as well as reduce the threat of the increased health risks associated with climate change.

We urge you to remove the mandatory sequestration as a source of funding for this legislation as it will only increase the financial burden imposed on physicians at this time and threaten their ability to deliver high quality care to their patients. Please do not hesitate to contact Brian Buckley, Senior Associate for Legislative Affairs at bbuckley@acponline.org if you have any questions regarding our views on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "George M. Abraham", is enclosed in a light gray dashed-line rectangular box. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

George M. Abraham, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA
President

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- ⁱ 1. World Health Organization. Social determinants of health. 2018. Accessed at www.who.int/social_determinants on 2 November 2017.
- ⁱⁱ . U.S. Census Bureau. Quick facts: Flint City, Michigan. Accessed at www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2629000,00 on 8 October 2016.
- ⁱⁱⁱ . Kennedy C, Yard E, Dignam T, Buchanan S, Condon S, Brown MJ, et al. Blood lead levels among children aged
- ^{iv} . Stanford University. Digital Divide. 2017. Accessed at <https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/digital-divide/start.html> on 1 August 2017.
- ^v Pai A. Letter regarding request for comment—actions to accelerate adoption and accessibility of broadband-enabled health care solutions and advanced technologies (GN docket no. 16-46, FCC 17-46). 24 May 2017. Accessed at www.amia.org/sites/default/files/AMIA-Response-to-FCC-Notice-on-Accelerating-Broadband-Health-Tech-Availability.pdf on 25 July 2017.
- ^{vi} [2020-state-telemedicine-report.pdf \(doxcdn.com\)](#), September 2020, p. 12
- ^{vii} . U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Fact Sheet: Overview of the Clean Power Plan. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; 2015. Accessed at www2.epa.gov/cleanpowerplan/fact-sheet-overview-clean-power-plan on 11 September 2015.