

**A Two-pronged Strategy to Improve American Health Care:  
*Make the Health System More Effective*  
**AND**  
*Remove Barriers to the Patient-Physician Relationship***

**Summary of the annual State of the Nation's Health Care report  
February 20, 2013**

In this paper, ACP proposes actions to build upon recent reforms under the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) and reduce barriers to the patient-physician relationship..

Effective on January 1, 2014, the ACA will begin to make affordable coverage available to nearly all legal residents, for the first time in U.S. history. Positive effects of the ACA that already can be seen today include guaranteed and improved health insurance and moderating health care costs. Currently, tens of millions of Americans are benefiting from the law through provisions that do things such as allow young adults to stay on their parents' health plans, seniors paying less for prescription drugs and preventative services, mandatory coverage for children with pre-existing conditions, and eliminating lifetime caps on insurance plans, especially for those with expensive illnesses. The United States is experiencing an unprecedented slowing of health care cost increases. 2012 marked the fourth consecutive year of record-low growth compared to all previous years of health care spending.

However, ACP recognizes current problems that need to be addressed regarding the ACA, including states denying federal Medicaid funds and looming budget cuts. States that refuse Medicaid expansion are denying health care to millions of their poorest and most vulnerable residents. Funding for vital health care programs is also in danger as sequestration, or across-the-board automatic spending cuts, are scheduled to occur on March 1, 2013. This would be devastating for health-related government agencies that provide vital administrative and research services as well as cuts in payments to physicians and hospitals, which would result in serious employee layoffs. Our nation's leaders need to address the growing primary-care physician shortage

ACP also recognizes the need to institute reforms to reduce injuries and deaths from firearms.

The paper makes the case that making improvements in the health care system will not, by themselves, be effective if intrusions on the patient-physician relationship are allowed to continue unabated. The unrelenting assault of the patient-physician relationship is left causing many physicians to leave their beloved profession.

**Recommendations to Make the Health System More Effective:**

- Renew commitment at both national and state levels to effectively implement the coverage expansion under ACA, particularly ensuring the poorest and most vulnerable have access to affordable coverage.

- Reach agreement in Congress and in the Administration on a plan to replace sequestration cuts and prevent future disruptions in funding for critical health care, by enacting fiscally- and socially- responsible alternatives to reduce unnecessary health care spending.
- Eliminate Medicare's SGR formula and support a transition to new payment models.
- Implement policies to recruit and retain primary-care physicians.
- Reduce firearms-related injuries and deaths by improving access to mental health services, supporting research on the causes and prevention of violence, and enacting reasonable controls over access to firearms that do not infringe on constitutionally protected rights.

### **Recommendations to Reduce Intrusions on the Patient-Physician Relationship:**

- Payment reforms must allow physicians to spend more appropriate clinical time with their patients.
- Payment and delivery reforms that hold physicians accountable for the outcomes of care should eliminate the layers of review and second-guessing of clinical decisions made by physicians.
- CMS should harmonize the measures used in different reporting programs.
- CMS should provide more clinically relevant ways to satisfy the requirement that physicians must transition to using ICD-10 codes for billing and reporting purposes.
- Congress and CMS should encourage participation in quality reporting programs by reducing administrative barriers, improving bonuses, and broadening hardship exemptions.
- The government, the medical profession, and standard-setting organizations should work with EHR vendors to improve the functional capabilities of their systems.
- Medicare and private insurers should move toward standardizing claims administration requirements, pre-authorization, and other administrative simplification requirements.
- Congress should enact meaningful medical liability reforms including health courts, early disclosure of errors, and caps on non-economic damages.
- State and federal authorities should avoid enactment of mandates that interfere with physicians' free speech and the patient-physician relationship.

### **For more information**

This issue brief is a summary of *A Two-pronged Strategy to Improve American Health Care: Make the Health System More Effective and Remove Barriers to the Patient-Physician Relationship*. The full paper is available at:

[http://www.acponline.org/advocacy/events/state\\_of\\_healthcare/](http://www.acponline.org/advocacy/events/state_of_healthcare/)