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COVID-19's Impact on Physicians: 3 Takeaways

By Jarrod Fowler, MHA
FMA Director of Health Care Policy & Innovation

On Monday, March 8, the Physician Advocacy Institute (PAI) released a summary of research related to COVID-19's impact on physicians and physician practices.

This compilation of research further bolsters the need to enact provisions of the FMA's **COVID Heroes legislative package**. The provisions of this package would help to protect the financial viability of physician practices, expand the telehealth availability, and ultimately support and expand access to high-quality care.

Below are three takeaways from the research:

1. The effects of the pandemic may reduce access to care or pose health consequences for patients.

- For instance, according to a **survey conducted by the Physicians Foundation**, 72% of physicians say patients who delay necessary care during the pandemic will have serious health consequences.
- Additionally, according to an **analysis by Avalere Health**, during the first three months of the pandemic, outpatient healthcare services plunged 51% and overall services decreased 42% in April.
- Additionally, the aforementioned Physicians Foundation survey found that 59% of physicians believe the pressures of the pandemic will result in fewer independent physician practices in their communities.

2. The pandemic had a deleterious effect on the economic viability of physician practices.

- According to the Physicians Foundation, 72% experienced a reduction in income, with 55% experiencing financial losses of 26% or more.

- In addition, **according to Kaufman Hall**, physician net revenue was down 4.5% in 2020.

3. Physicians overwhelmingly agree about the benefits of expanding telehealth.

- For instance, according to the **COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition**, 75% of physicians reported that telemedicine enabled them to provide quality care in the areas of COVID-19-related care, acute care, chronic disease management, hospital/ED follow-up, care coordination, preventive care, and mental/behavioral health.
- **According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, patients were also highly satisfied with telehealth. Three-quarters of adult patients reported satisfaction with these visits. Adults with more complex healthcare needs reported less overall satisfaction with telehealth visits than those without underlying medical conditions. Adults living outside of metropolitan areas were less likely to use telehealth than those living in metropolitan areas. Research published in *JAMA* similarly found patient satisfaction rates with telehealth were high, with 78.2% reporting satisfaction with their last telehealth visits.

Finally, there is increasing evidence that telehealth use was critical to delivering patient services during the pandemic. According to **research published in Health Affairs**, 30.1% of all outpatient visits were done via telemedicine between mid-March and mid-June of 2020. Telemedicine use increased twenty-three-fold in the early months of the coronavirus pandemic but despite this increase, overall outpatient visit volume fell 35%.

