

New York State Academy of Family Physicians

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NEWS RELEASE

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Family Physicians and Students Travel to Albany for Lobby Day Focused on Ensuring Access to High Quality Primary Care for Patients

March 9, 2015, Albany, N.Y. Family physicians, residents and students from across the State travelled to Albany for the State Academy of Family Physicians' annual lobby day. The Academy represents over 6,000 physicians, residents and students in family medicine. Family physicians are primary care providers who serve as the entry point for patients' health needs and coordinate their care throughout their lifetime.

While at the Capitol, Academy members met with state lawmakers, officials to the Governor and the State Department of Health to discuss issues of importance to patients and the family physicians who care for them. The Academy's top priority is access to high quality primary care services for all New Yorkers. To achieve this, family physicians are seeking funding in the Final State Budget this year to continue the Primary Care Rate Increase (PCRI) to put Medicaid rates on par with those in Medicare.

"The PCRI was instituted with state and federal funding for 2013 and 2014. Such funding has expired and we are asking New York to continue this vital program with a state investment of \$70 million," said Academy President Mark Josefski, MD. "The PCRI has been highly successful in expanding Medicaid patient access to primary care physicians and services. Such services are proven to improve care and reduce costs through the prevention of illness and far more costly inpatient care."

State statistics show that as of March 2014, nearly 13,000 primary care physicians in New York were PCRI-eligible Medicaid providers and collectively they provided over 1.85 million patient visits since the start of the program in January 2013. Another study found that the PCRI improved primary care appointment availability, particularly for new Medicaid patients, without leading to longer wait times (*The New England Journal of Medicine*, January 21, 2015). Despite its success, PCRI funding expired and New York's Medicaid payments for primary care returned to the third lowest in the nation at less than half of Medicare rates (42%). Six other states have sustained the increase and fifteen say they will.

"The expiration of the PCRI is penny-wise and pound-foolish," said Marc Price, DO, Advocacy Chair for the Academy. "With the Affordable Care Act, millions of patients for the first time have health insurance, many of whom are enrolled in Medicaid. But having a health insurance card is meaningless if patients do not have access to essential primary care services. A continued state investment in the PCRI through the state budget is critical to improve Medicaid patient access to high quality and cost effective primary care services. We applaud state leaders for supporting PCRI for two years and respectfully ask that they continue it."

While in Albany, family physicians and students also discussed their support for expanded access to recommended vaccines and three pieces of legislation. These include a bill to establish a single payer health system in New York and a measure to enable physicians to collectively negotiate with health insurers to ensure patient access to the providers and services they need. Also the Academy strongly supports legislation to delay for one year to March 31, 2016 the law requiring all prescriptions written in New York to be electronically prescribed by physicians and other providers. This bill has passed both houses and awaits action by the Governor.