

Advocacy Update

GIVING ALLEGHENY COUNTY PHYSICIANS A VOICE

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As we move into a busy fall for organized medicine, the ACMS Advocacy Task Force continues to focus on one central goal: ensuring that the perspectives of Allegheny County physicians are part of the conversations shaping medicine, public health and patient care.

Over the past year, ACMS has become increasingly active in responding to policy developments when we believe the physician voice is important. Most recently, ACMS issued a statement on President Trump's August executive order directing changes to the nation's childhood vaccination schedule, including recommendations related to the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Our statement reaffirmed a straightforward principle: vaccination recommendations should be guided by rigorous scientific evidence and established clinical expertise. Physicians must be able to counsel patients and families using the best available evidence and their own clinical judgment.

Our response aligns with ACMS's mission to educate our community regarding the public health. Additionally, the statement highlights one of ACMS's primary advocacy pillars: physician autonomy to make the right decision in collaboration with, and in the best interest of, our patients. The response also demonstrated why it is important for ACMS to participate in these conversations. The statement received significant local media attention, including coverage by Pittsburgh City Paper and a discussion on Our Region's Business with Bill Flanagan. That visibility gives physicians an opportunity to bring clinical expertise into conversations that are increasingly taking place beyond the exam room.

ACMS's work to bolster community support for vaccination couldn't have come with more urgency, as Allegheny County faces rising measles cases on its doorstep over recent weeks.

HOW ACMS ADVOCACY POSITIONS ARE DEVELOPED

As ACMS becomes more visible on public policy issues, we also want members to understand how these positions are developed and approved.

ACMS members elect physician leaders to the Board of Directors to represent the membership and guide the organization. The Advocacy Task Force works within that governance structure to evaluate emerging issues and recommend when, and how, ACMS should engage.

For issues requiring a timely response, the Advocacy Task Force reviews the matter and develops a proposed position or statement. That recommendation then moves to the ACMS Executive Committee for review and approval, with the ACMS Board provided the final statement and an opportunity for any final comments prior to public release.

This process allows ACMS to respond quickly enough for our voice to be relevant while ensuring that our advocacy remains physician-led and grounded in the governance structure established by, and representing, our members.

Not every physician will agree with every position ACMS takes. Organized medicine encompasses physicians with different specialties, experiences and perspectives. With that said, the Advocacy Task Force wants to hear from you, to ensure we're focused on the issues that unite us. Our responsibility is



Richard Hoffmaster, MD speaks with Bill Flanagan on Our Region's Business

to have a thoughtful process, rely on the expertise of our physician leaders and speak when an issue has meaningful implications for physicians, patients or the practice of medicine.

BRINGING PHYSICIANS AND POLICYMAKERS TOGETHER

Advocacy is also about relationships, and our August 12 Legislative Update and Leadership Social was a great example of that work in action.

ACMS physician leaders gathered with policymakers and healthcare leaders for an evening focused on the issues affecting medicine in Pennsylvania and here in Allegheny County. We were pleased to welcome State Representative Arvind Venkat, MD; State Representative Jeremy Shaffer; and Jillian Irwin, MD, Medical Director and Deputy Director of Clinical Services for the Allegheny County Health Department, as well as Zac Gates and Wayne Crawford from the PAMED legislative team.

The discussion gave our members an opportunity to hear different perspectives on the policy environment in Harrisburg and to talk about issues affecting physicians, practices and patients. Just as importantly, the evening created space for conversations outside of the formal legislative process.

We may not agree on every policy issue, nor should we expect to. But establishing relationships with elected officials and other decision-makers - and making sure they have opportunities to hear directly from practicing physicians - is an important part of effective advocacy.

The discussion covered a multitude of topics important to Allegheny County physicians, including concerns regarding the imminent



ACMS Leadership at the August 12 Legislative Update and Leadership Social

loss of Medicaid coverage for vulnerable patients, opportunities to improve physician-stakeholder communication surrounding the benefits of vaccination and other public health issues at the local level, and the risks and opportunities related to market competition in the context of large health systems and rising private equity interests. Thank you to the many ACMS Board members, delegates, physician leaders and guests who joined us.

A NEW HOME FOR ADVOCACY UPDATES

Members can now follow this work more easily through the new Advocacy Updates section of the ACMS website [<https://www.acms.org/advocacy-updates/>]. The page brings together ACMS statements, policy updates, advocacy opportunities and other resources in one place, and provides direct connections to ACMS leadership and policymakers.

As advocacy becomes a larger part of our work, we hope this resource helps members understand not only where ACMS stands, but what is happening at the local, state and national levels that may affect their practices and patients.

We will also be watching the Pennsylvania Medical Society House of Delegates closely in October. ACMS physicians, residents and medical students will participate in the House, where policies

proposed by physicians from across Pennsylvania will be debated and considered. Following the meeting, we will share updates on key policy decisions and what they may mean for physicians in Allegheny County.

GET INVOLVED

Effective advocacy depends on physicians who are willing to lend their experience and perspective to the conversation.

As we plan for 2027, we welcome ACMS members who are interested in serving on the Advocacy Task Force. You do not need to be a policy expert. We are looking for physicians who care about the future of medicine, are interested in the issues affecting their colleagues and patients, and want to help ACMS determine where our collective voice can make a difference.

If you are interested in getting involved, email acms@acms.org.

And between issues of the Bulletin, be sure to follow ACMS on social media and visit the Advocacy Updates page at [acms.org/advocacy-updates](https://www.acms.org/advocacy-updates) for timely updates and opportunities to participate.

AI Disclosure: The ideas and perspectives expressed in this article are the author's own. Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to assist with drafting and refining the text.