



The ongoing expansion of Medicare Advantage (MA), a federal minimum-wage hike and additional support for front-line health care workers during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

These are just a few of the industry-shaping topics that home health insiders are following going into Election Day this Tuesday. While each presidential election is important, 2020 will help set the trajectory of U.S. health care policy for years to come.

No matter who wins between President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden, one thing is clear: In-home care gained a larger role in the overall continuum of care this year — and that momentum isn't going away.

To get a deeper understanding of the 2020 election and what it means for home-based care operators, Home Health Care News reached out to several stakeholders for their perspective. Their responses are provided below, edited for length and clarity.

* * *

Regardless of who wins, the fundamentals for home health care remain the same. There is a growing need for more care and higher levels of care in the home. The pandemic has only accelerated this trend as family members eschew institutional care settings. Meanwhile, telemedicine and virtual care will play the dual role of supporting quality care in the home — particularly for patients who need fewer services — and blurring the lines of what is considered traditional home care.

As state Medicaid budgets tighten, care for dually eligible individuals who have chronic and long-term care needs will need to be addressed. These individuals account for 20% of Medicare and 15% of Medicaid enrollment, yet account for about a third of spending for each. In-home care and care management can play a critical role in improving outcomes while reducing the overall cost of care. However, the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), Congress and state Medicaid programs will need to figure out the right models to integrate this care while figuring out who pays for what and who gets the savings.

Ensuring that home health agencies can fully participate in virtual care initiatives — including reimbursement for such services — and ensuring that dual eligible integrated care efforts fully value the impact of care in the home are two of our top priorities.

— Marki Flannery, president & CEO of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY)

* * *

The health care industry experienced unprecedented strains this year, but we also made strides in many areas. At the highest level, we saw bipartisan cooperation in the time of crisis that led to solutions for those acutely impacted by the pandemic, from telehealth coverage to Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans.

Regardless of the 2020 election outcome, in 2021, we're turning our focus to a few key areas based on lessons learned from the public health emergency. Further elevating home health care as a viable care alternative is crucial. Whether it was helping to divert the surge on hospitals or sending patients home to recuperate from the effects of the virus in order to free up ICU beds, home care really rose to the occasion.

While there has been an increased appreciation and awareness of the power of home health care, there is still an opportunity to elevate understanding around the need for better home care reimbursement rates, fueled by an authentic understanding of the tireless value skilled and direct care workers provide. We are also working towards ways to secure and drive more competitive pay so that the home health care industry can more effectively fill the labor demand needed to support Americans who want to heal and thrive safely at home. We are continuing to see how cost-effective and truly preferred the home setting is for seniors who desire to age in place safely and securely. We want to do everything in our power to make this option more accessible.

— Jennifer Sheets, president & CEO, Interim HealthCare

* * *

Regardless of the outcome of the election, the prospects for positive legislation impacting the home health sector in 2021 are promising. The new Congress will be interested in making policy changes to strengthen the Medicare program, examining the needs of the Medicare population and building off of lessons learned because of COVID-19. One of these lessons is that access to home health care for vulnerable populations can and should be optimized, particularly at times when the Medicare patient population is uniquely vulnerable. The home health community has developed policy solutions that offer Medicare beneficiaries a wider array of post-acute care options, including those that expand the availability of care at home.

Being able to “choose home” for more Medicare patients who need care, as an alternative to other institutional care, can not only ensure that high-quality clinical care is available to a wider Medicare population, but can also ensure safety and increased patient choice.

We have also seen that care in the home should be optimized through increased use of technology. The availability of telehealth should be expanded upon for Medicare home health patients, particularly in times when infection risk is high, as was the case during COVID-19. The Partnership believes that telehealth opportunities should be optimized to ensure continuity of care for our nation's most vulnerable patients.

— Joanne Cunningham, executive director, Partnership for Quality Home Healthcare (PQHH)

* * *

I'm hopeful that the current election will have a very positive impact on the home health industry going forward. That is because our industry has done a wonderful job over the years of advocating for our interests with a paramount emphasis on bipartisanship that is clearly evidenced in the recently introduced federal legislation calling for home health telehealth reimbursement during national emergencies.

In both the House and the Senate, these bills are being sponsored and supported by both Democrats and Republicans. That is extraordinarily significant. And coupled with the magnificent work our industry has done treating those in need during the current pandemic, the message has been communicated far and wide that our industry's support spans the partisan political divide and is here to simply treat patients, clients and families with the health care services they need, when they need them, in the comfort, safety, security and familiarity of their homes.

— Dean Chaliros, president & CEO, California Association for Health Services at Home (CAHSAH)

* * *

Home care and hospice have the advantage of being supported by both parties. As such, whatever the outcome of the election, we expect any health care reforms to embrace health care at home as the awareness of its value has grown significantly during the pandemic. Once the dust settles after the election, we are prepared to work with the incoming Congress and administration to further advance home care and hospice.

— William A. Dombi, president of the National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC)

* * *

The outcome of the 2020 presidential election could greatly impact legislation, support, attention and funding for home health care workers and agencies. Additionally, if the non-chronic illness Medicare-eligibility age is reduced to age 60 vs. 65, that will be a tremendous game-changer for payers, providers, patients and the entire health care ecosystem.

— Cleamon Moorer, Jr., president & CEO, American Advantage Home Care Inc.