

Louisiana Independent Pharmacies Association

What's New and What to Watch

LIPA Newsletter:

Bringing you the latest news and information concerning independent pharmacies and the profession at-large....



Members,

In this year of challenges, we can now add **winter** weather that interrupts/cripple's business operations to the list. Many of you worked this week to balance power outages, the safety of your patients and employees, and your role as a purveyor of essential prescription drugs to your patients. **Thousands** of appointments for COVID vaccines—both first and second doses-- had to be cancelled.

When vaccine shipments for the week of February 22nd are delivered, Louisiana independent pharmacies will have received more than 100,000 doses of vaccine in the two months period that independent pharmacies have been included vaccine allocation. Of the 270 independent pharmacies currently enrolled in the COVID vaccine program, **225** of them will have received at least 100 doses of vaccine.

The LIPA Board will be meeting next week via Zoom to discuss the many matters of importance to our membership and priorities. Our 2021 legislative session is less than two months away and January brought a new Administration and Congress to Washington DC.

Another Administration and Congress, Another Opportunity for DIR Relief

One of our new LIPA members recently asked what we consider to be the top issues for independent pharmacies that need to be communicated to members of our Congressional delegation. The importance of **DIR relief** in the Medicare program **leads the list** as it is an issue that requires intervention at the federal (rather than state level). The *Rutledge* decision was about ERISA and not Medicare pharmacy reimbursement so it does not impact DIR fees. Federal Medicare regulations still take precedence over any contrary state law.

Our federal partner NCPA states that ending DIR fees has been their [top priority](#) since 2014. A good “explainer” of the issue is this [one pager](#) created by NCPA that lays out the reasoning behind *NCPA vs Azar* which seeks to have the courts nullify DIR fees, in the absence of any action at the level of Congress or HHS.

The Latest on Those Delayed Vaccine Shipments

Of the six million doses of vaccine for which shipment has been delayed because of weather, more than 15,000 are new first doses for Louisiana independent pharmacies who were confirmed to get vaccine for the week of February 15th. The Biden administration said in a news briefing Friday morning that the winter storms have caused shipment delays affecting roughly six million coronavirus vaccine doses across the country. This afternoon, **The Wall Street Journal** published an [online story](#) with the most concise information we have seen about when vaccine shipments can be expected.

Andy Slavitt, senior adviser to the White House Covid-19 response team (and who previously was the CMS Administrator during the Obama6 Administration), said Friday morning that the shipments were delayed by three days because of the severe weather. You may recall that due to the President's Day and Mardi Gras holidays, the shipment of new first doses of vaccine in Louisiana were not scheduled to arrive until Wednesday February 17th. **The administration expects all doses to arrive in the next week and is taking steps to extend delivery windows and speed shipments, he said.** Mr. Slavitt said that United Parcel Service Inc. and FedEx Corp. would make deliveries Saturday and that vaccine maker Moderna Inc. is working through Sunday to package backlogged orders, which will be sent by plane to states by early next week. The administration is asking states and providers to extend vaccination hours and appointments as **both the backlogged and regularly planned shipments arrive.** He said 1.4 million doses were already in transit as of Friday.

How Can Independent Pharmacies Express Their Value?

Pharmacy Times published an online article on 2.16.21 titled [Independent Pharmacies Must Express Their Value to Support Long Term Viability](#) that includes “food for thought.” An independent pharmacist quoted, emphasizes that local needs are often met by offering pharmacy services complemented by collaboration with non-pharmacy groups. They strive to close care and service gaps for the people who live and work in their communities and neighborhoods who are not only patients but colleagues, friends, and family members. One question asked is whether independent pharmacies have been so busy focusing locally on the needs of their patients that they have been less able to stay engaged with some of the **changes occurring in the industry**. How do independent pharmacies effectively demonstrate their value in the face of consolidation and aggregation? Suggestions in the article for independent pharmacies to ensure their long-term viability include:

- Increasing consumer awareness that the independent pharmacy provides a **different** type of service, a **more personalized level of service** that’s available in their communities
- Expanded scope of practice: *“We need to expand the ability of pharmacists to provide care beyond dispensing to enable those services to be paid for and covered under the medical benefit, [as] many services provided are not necessarily linked to a prescription drug. So that’s going to lead to the ability for pharmacists to participate in emerging value-based care models”*
- Continued access to patients and products. With vertical integration, patients are increasingly being lured to other pharmacies owned by the PBM or insurer.

The article concludes by making the point that independent pharmacies must express the value they provide to the entire health care system in aggregate. *“That value is not in the price or the number of the prescriptions we dispense, as we’ll never be able to compete with Fortune 50 companies on price, or with 90-day mail order on [proportion of days covered]. Our value is expressed in the ability to close local gaps in care, utilization of local relationships, lead care coordination, target of social determinants of health, follow up with patients, and conducting screenings, assessments, and interventions,”* Logan said, *“That ultimately [lets us] meet patients where they are in improving their personal health outcomes. When aggregated, that is tremendously more valuable than a \$5 lower generic co-pay at a different pharmacy.”*

Collaborating with Community Partners for COVID Vaccines

One of the areas that member pharmacies can collaborate with non-pharmacy groups in their communities is COVID vaccines. Those non-pharmacy groups can include local nursing homes and group homes, schools, community organizations, and churches.

- Do nursing homes with whom you have an existing relationship have an identified partner for vaccine administration once the federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long Term Care officially ends?
- Are local schools looking for someone to come on-site and administer vaccines?
- Can you collaborate with community organizations or churches to provide vaccine events in your community?

Still Thinking About Enrolling as a COVID Vaccine Provider??

If you have not yet enrolled as a COVID vaccine provider, there has never been a better time to get enrolled **quickly**. As of yesterday, LDH had **fewer than ten applications** waiting to be processed. You can find the application form that needs to be completed—and improved instructions for completing it—[here](#).

You Have Vaccine Questions? We Try to Get Answers for You

For the past two months, LIPA staff has been in “rapid response mode” answering hundreds of COVID vaccine-related questions from our members via e-mails and phone calls. This is a service we are happy to offer to our member pharmacies and their employees. LDH leadership has been very supportive in providing our LIPA staff with direct access to Immunization Program leadership. We are able to let them know what we are hearing from “the front lines” and get answers to your questions and the information you need. An example of such a question is the following we received:

We were approached by the local school district to be their providing pharmacy for the COVID vaccines. Now that the governor has moved us into the tier where educators are able to get the vaccine, what do I need to do to see about getting their doses? They told me they contacted the LA Dept. of Education, but were unable to get any information about how we were supposed to receive the vaccine. Do you happen to know anything about this?

Since we had not heard anything, LIPA staff reached out via e-mail to the Immunization Program leadership who replied, “There are discussions about on-site vaccination being coordinated by DoE. Currently, eligible persons can reach out to local vaccine providers at established locations. There’s no additional vaccine allocated specifically for this group of persons. LDH balances vaccine uptake when expanding eligibility.

Please continue to reach out to us with your vaccine questions. You can contact our COVID Vaccine Coordinator Ruth Kennedy by e-mail at kennedy@lipa.org (kennedy@ssgla.com still works as well) or by phone at 225-241-1437.

90 Day Special Enrollment Period for Marketplace Health Coverage

Do you have patients and customers without health insurance but whose income exceeds the 138% FPL limit to enroll in Louisiana Medicaid? On Monday, a 90-day Special Enrollment Period (SEP) opened for individuals and families to apply and enroll in Marketplace Health Coverage (Obamacare). According to the HHS [press release](#), 9 out of 10 people enrolled in the program are receiving help (through tax credits) to pay the monthly premium. This SEP will be in effect through May 15, 2021 and will be available to consumers in the 36 states served by Marketplaces that use [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov), including Louisiana.

Have You Claimed You/Your Employees Claimed CPE Credit?

If you participated in either the 1.17.21 or 1.31.21 CPE activity have not yet completed the online Evaluation Form to complete your credit, please do so as soon as possible. ACPE requires that credit be submitted within 60 days of the date that activity was completed. Use this link to receive credit for the [LIPA 1.17 CPE Activity Claim Form & Evaluation](#), and please check your email for the link you should have received to verify your credit for the 1.31.21 CPE activity.

In the News:

Walgreens abruptly cancels coronavirus vaccine appointments, blames website glitches

[Nola.com 02/13/2021](#)

Walgreens Pharmacies has abruptly canceled first and second doses of the coronavirus vaccine due to website outages, the company says. While it’s unclear how many appointments are affected, people across the New Orleans area have reported cancellations with short notice.

For weeks, Paul Mohor, 70, had a second-dose appointment scheduled at 3:45 p.m. Friday at the Walgreens store in the Garden District, and he even received a reminder email this week. Two hours before his appointment for the Moderna shot, an employee called to cancel, saying the store ran out of vaccine a day earlier.

“There is no direction about what I’m supposed to do,” Mohor said. The pharmacist suggested he make another appointment at a different Walgreens, but the website was not showing availability. He was unable to schedule elsewhere, because vaccine providers typically require both doses be administered at the same place.

The myth of 'good' and 'bad' Covid vaccines: Why false perceptions overlook facts, and could breed resentment

[STAT 02/17/2021](#)

Mike Ryan, the World Health Organization's health emergencies director, had a conversation recently with his mother, the kind that lots of public health people are having these days, much to their dismay. Ryan's mother was concerned about one of the Covid-19 vaccines in use in Ireland, where she lives. The one made by AstraZeneca.

Clinical trials had shown the vaccine offered protection against the disease, but less than the vaccine made by Moderna or the one made by Pfizer and BioNTech. Ryan's mother was worried the vaccine might not be good enough.

Ryan, never one to mince words, decided it was time for a come-to-Jesus' chat with his 80-year-old mother. "Whatever vaccine they show up with, you take it," he told her. "Because that is the best decision you can make on that day for your health."

CHRIS HARLOW: Legislation needed to protect patient/pharmacist relationship

[The Daily Independent 02/18/2021](#)

Kentucky House Bill 48, sponsored by Rep. Danny Bentley, solves a problem that pharmacists have been facing for years. But with the pandemic stretching health care resources thin and demand for pharmacy services continuing to rise, we cannot kick the can down the road any longer.

Despite the important role pharmacists play in the health care system, Kentucky lacks a mechanism to properly reimburse them for many of the critical services they provide to their patients, including the potentially life-saving SUD treatment we offer at St. Matthews.

HB 48 establishes a claims submission process that ensures pharmacists are reimbursed for the same services for which other care providers are reimbursed. Insurance companies would no longer be able to deny reimbursement to a pharmacist for providing a service or procedure within the pharmacist's scope of practice if that same service or procedure is covered by the plan when provided by a physician, advanced practice nurse or physician assistant.

We're not asking for special treatment. The legislation does not expand pharmacists' scope of practice or mandate equal pay for pharmacists and physicians. It simply ensures pharmacists are reimbursed for the services they are already providing to patients — services that are helping to manage chronic health conditions, lead to better health outcomes, prevent hospitalizations, and at St. Matthews Community & Specialty Pharmacy, are helping people reach long-term remission and recovery from substance use disorders. It's time for insurance companies to recognize pharmacists as valuable members of the care team and reimburse us as such.

La Vaccines Access Expands to Teachers

[American Press 02/19/2021](#)

Gov. John Bel Edwards announced Thursday that Louisiana will begin granting priority access of the COVID-19 vaccine to early childhood center workers and pre-k through twelfth grade educators and support staff on Monday. Cade Brumley, Louisiana Department of Education superintendent, expressed his support of the decision saying the decision recognizes that educators are indeed essential workers.

"This signifies the value of our essential employees and will enable even more Louisiana centers and schools to be fully open to serve students, families and communities," Brumley said.

The LDOE has been working with districts statewide over the last month to help them prepare for the potential of Thursday's announcement. Plans include helping districts identify the number of vaccines needed and medical community partners to help administer the vaccine.

The department's request to be included in the current eligibility tier was ear-marked for approximately 167,000 individuals including teachers and leaders as well as support staff such as cafeteria workers, secretaries and bus drivers. "Our belief is that this allows access for those individuals."