What Types of Public Policy Issues Are Important to the COPD Community?

Despite being the 3rd leading cause of death and a huge driver of disability and healthcare utilization, government awareness and support remain lacking. Awareness of COPD among state and federal elected and regulatory officials is shockingly low, there is NO COPD program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lung disease overall is the 14th most funded category of research at the NIH and most states have no ongoing COPD efforts. The COPD Foundation is committed to supporting public policies that will improve the prevention, diagnosis, management and research for COPD and ensure that all individuals with COPD have access to appropriate, high quality care.

The COPD Foundation is actively engaged in the following areas of public policy:

Access to Care

COPD patients experience challenges accessing necessary treatments and services that are critical for managing their health. These challenges can be the result of finances, accessibility, availability and more. State and federal policies should promote practices and programs that ensure patients have access to routine care and are able to access whatever treatments that their doctors feel are the best for them. Restrictive formularies, high cost sharing, uninsured caught in coverage gaps and other systematic issues result in unnecessary health consequences for patients.

How Healthcare is Paid for and Delivered

Most COPD patients have complex medical needs and the COPD Foundation recognizes that paying for and coordinating care to meet these needs is resource intensive. The vast state and federal authority over reimbursement policies and the design of incentives and penalty programs should be exercised to ensure that the health system can meet the needs of COPD patients in a proactive fashion rather than continuing a reliance on reactive treatment of acute events. These policies and programs should be informed by the voices of the patients they serve.

Improving the Quality of Care

COPD patients only receive evidence-based care about half of the time. Numerous state and federal efforts are focused on improving health outcomes and these programs and quality measures hold great power to raise the priority level that is placed on COPD. Wherever appropriate, these efforts should include COPD in a meaningful way, and in a way that does not result in unintended harm to patients

which must be monitored. It is also important that the patient community be involved in the design of quality improvement efforts initiated or incentivized by the federal and state governments and that the results of those efforts are disseminated widely.

Regulation of Medications and Medical Devices

To truly advance the fight against COPD and develop new and better therapies and technology, a strong but flexible regulatory system is critical. Regulation of pharmaceutical and device industries should promote safe and efficient innovation that leads to better therapies and outcomes for our patients. The Food and Drug Administration should be partners with the patient community and all stakeholders they serve, to learn what matters most to patients when it comes to the risk and benefit considerations of patients with COPD and to identify ways in which patients can contribute to the regulatory decision making process.

Public Health

Unlike many other leading causes of death, COPD has not seen the improvements in mortality and morbidity that have been a result of large scale public health campaigns focused on improved recognition of early symptoms, community screening efforts and chronic disease self-management education. Existing prevention efforts focused on important issues like tobacco control, clean air, healthy workplaces and more must be amplified and should explore how those with existing COPD can be targeted for additional support in making tough but critical lifestyle modifications. COPD must be embedded in the public health infrastructure of our nation.