

News Release
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NAACOS Welcomes Today's Rural Health Announcement from CMS

Attributed to Clif Gaus, Sc.D., President and CEO of the National Association of ACOs

Today's announcement from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on helping rural providers move to alternative payment models is a needed and welcomed step for our health system's move to value-based payment. The [ACO Transformation Track](#) offers resource-deprived rural providers a helping hand to invest in the tools needed to build accountable care models, including health IT, data analytics and care managers. NAACOS has for the last couple of years encouraged CMS to restart the ACO Investment Model, on which today's ACO Transformation Track is based. The ACO Investment Model has been one of [the most successful models](#) from the CMS Innovation Center, saving Medicare \$382 million over three years and helping start new, successful and long-lasting ACOs. NAACOS thanks CMS Administrator Seema Verma and CMS Innovation Center Director Brad Smith for their leadership on this issue.

Another way to support rural providers in ACOs would be for CMS to address a flaw in how CMS sets ACO spending targets (i.e., benchmarks) to ensure rural ACOs are not disadvantaged compared to other ACOs. Often referred to as the "rural glitch," NAACOS has long called for CMS to fix its benchmarking methodology. In addition to providing new opportunities to rural providers, NAACOS calls on CMS to continue expanding the progress of ACOs by allowing new ACOs to join the Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP) in 2021. Earlier this year the agency canceled a new 2021 MSSP ACO class due to challenges with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

ACOs have [demonstrated](#) that they are uniquely equipped to respond to the pandemic, and our health system needs more accountable care models and participants today given their ability to help provide high-quality, preventive, coordinated care. For example, ACOs have used their population management systems and other tools to educate patients about minimizing exposure, make sure they have enough food and medication to stay home, remotely monitor their underlying conditions, treat cases through telemedicine, and manage post-discharge complications with integrated home health and effective relationships with post-acute providers. NAACOS looks forward to working with CMS and providers interested in the new rural accountable care opportunities while also advocating for and supporting existing ACO models.

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About NAACOS. The National Association of ACOs (NAACOS) represents more than 12 million beneficiary lives through hundreds of organizations participating in population health-focused payment and delivery models in Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurance. Models include the Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP), Next Generation ACOs, and alternative payment models supported by a myriad of commercial health plans and Medicare Advantage. NAACOS is a member-led and member-owned nonprofit organization that works to improve quality of care, outcomes, and healthcare cost efficiency