

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 13, 2012

Contact:

Cristina Scarpaci

202.585.2065

cscarpaci@powelltate.com

AMIC Says White House Budget Proposal Threatens Patient Access to Medical Imaging

*Proposals to Increase Equipment Utilization Assumption and Adopt Prior Authorization
Not Supported by Data*

Washington, D.C. – The Access to Medical Imaging Coalition (AMIC) called on Congress today to reject proposals in the President’s 2013 budget proposal that would harm patients’ access to life-saving early detection and diagnostic services. The Administration has proposed cutting Medicare imaging reimbursements by \$820 million over 10 years through an increase in the assumed rate of utilization of advanced imaging equipment and implementing prior authorization for medical imaging in the Medicare program as a means of controlling costs.

“The White House’s proposals to cut imaging payments for the eighth time in as many years and to adopt prior authorization for medical imaging are not supported by the data and threaten patient access to timely diagnosis and treatment of heart disease, cancer and other life-threatening conditions,” said Tim Trysla, Executive Director of AMIC. “These policies would also mean a direct hit on high-tech manufacturing, which is exactly contrary to the Administration’s stated goal of preserving and creating these types of jobs at home.”

Medicare spending for imaging services has declined substantially since 2006, and the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) recently verified that imaging use actually declined by 2.5 percent in 2010. Medicare payment cuts have also had a significant and direct impact on the health and safety of patients. A recent study in *Health Affairs* on dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) screening for osteoporosis found that DXA screening in all Medicare Part B settings plateaued in 2007-2009 after the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 cut Part B imaging payments, following a decade of growth in the use of DXA to detect osteoporosis. In those years, 800,000 fewer tests were performed than expected for Medicare beneficiaries, which could have prevented 12,000 fractures and the associated healthcare costs.

Meanwhile, there has been no scientific, peer-reviewed research on the safety, efficacy or impact on administrative costs of radiology benefits managers (RBMs). In fact, a recent AMIC literature review found that policy proposals to adopt prior authorization for medical imaging, including RBMs, would produce no cost savings. On the contrary, a prior authorization policy could cost the government more than it saves, while imposing administrative burdens and increased costs on physician practices.

“The budget estimates confirm what our analysis showed—that a prior authorization program will in fact produce zero savings. RBMs will only mean increased burdens on physician practices and delays in patients receiving needed care,” said Trysla. “The White House, Congress and CMS cannot ignore the data: utilization is on a downward trend and prior authorization doesn't work and will end up costing taxpayers more.”

With reports confirming that medical imaging use is down and is not increasing health care costs, AMIC warned that prior authorization will only further hinder access to life-saving diagnostic imaging services. AMIC supports the adoption of physician-developed appropriateness criteria and the use of decision support tools, which are approaches that have proven effective in driving appropriate imaging use without compromising patient access to the right scan at the right time.

As Congress considers spending for 2013, Trysla said, “We encourage policymakers to reject these proposals included in the Administration’s 2013 budget and to consider the value of medical imaging in saving lives and preserving quality of life, while preventing higher health care costs over the long term.”

###

The Access to Medical Imaging Coalition represents more than 100,000 physicians, medical providers, and patient organizations throughout the U.S. It also includes health technology firms that manufacture imaging equipment and supplies and that employ tens of thousands of workers. Thus, AMIC represents those who develop medical imaging technologies, those who apply it, and those who benefit from it.