

Respiratory Therapy Access Working Group

2026 MEETING SUMMARY

The Alliance for Patient Access' Respiratory Therapy Access Working Group convened clinicians from across the country on October 2-3, 2026, in Washington, DC. Meeting participants discussed ongoing barriers to respiratory care and opportunities for advocacy.

UTILIZATION MANAGEMENT

Prior Authorization and Reauthorization

Clinicians expressed frustration with prior authorization delays and poor communication from insurers. Coverage denials often go unnoticed, leaving clinicians and patients unaware of treatment barriers. "We struggle with prior authorization delays because we are finding out about denials much later," one clinician said.

Reauthorization requires patients to repeatedly prove that their prescribed medications are still effective, often requiring additional appointments and paperwork for clinicians. These ongoing requirements take time away from patient care and add to an already heavy administrative burden.

Step Therapy

Step therapy continues to limit treatment options for patients with respiratory conditions. By requiring patients to try and fail other medications before receiving their prescribed treatment, insurers can delay appropriate care and undermine clinical decisions. Participants emphasized that even short delays can add up, potentially leading to worsening symptoms and unnecessary stress for patients and clinicians.

Nonmedical Switching

Clinicians raised concerns about insurers switching patients' medications. One clinician said, "There's never a clinical indication for why a medication changed." Participants shared that insurers sometimes recommend alternatives from different drug classes or medications that are not FDA-approved for the patient's condition. These decisions can disrupt effective treatment and limit clinicians' ability to provide care based on their patients' needs.



Formulary Exclusions

Formulary exclusions prevent patients from receiving prescribed treatments. Participants noted that some employer-sponsored insurance plans exclude entire classes of medications, including biologics, leaving patients with limited treatment options.

Clinicians also expressed frustration with the lack of transparency surrounding coverage decisions. “For patients, it’s so difficult to even find the formulary to know if it’s excluded or not,” one clinician said. Participants emphasized the need for greater transparency and coverage policies that reflect patients’ medical needs rather than create additional barriers to care.

CLINICAL GUIDELINES

Meeting participants discussed the role of clinical guidelines in supporting treatment decisions and improving patient care. Guidelines can help explain standards of care in plain language, making treatment recommendations easier for patients, insurers and policymakers to understand. There were concerns, however, about the growing influence of insurance coverage and impact on clinical decisions. They emphasized that guidelines should support evidence-based care and informed treatment choices rather than create additional barriers to prescribed therapies.

COPD AWARENESS

There is a need for greater awareness of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, and a stronger focus on early diagnosis and prevention. One clinician said, “Our system is built around treating acute illness and not prevention.” Clinicians agreed that earlier intervention could help preserve lung function and improve patient outcomes. They also stressed the importance of including respiratory therapists throughout diagnosis and treatment. Participants encouraged greater collaboration between clinicians and policymakers to make preventive care and existing treatment tools more accessible to patients.

NEXT STEPS

Meeting participants were eager about the opportunity to use their clinician voice on behalf of their patients. Participants offered ideas for new educational resources and expressed interest in legislative engagement.

GET INVOLVED

To learn more about AfPA’s Respiratory Therapy Access Working Group, contact Megan Vogt
mvogt@allianceforpatientaccess.org
and visit our website at
AllianceForPatientAccess.Org