



# 2026 Advocacy Priorities

## ENSURE THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF PHYSICIAN PRACTICES

- **Reform Medicare Payments:** Urge policymakers to halt harmful surgical care cuts and enact reforms that ensure stable, sustainable reimbursement.
- **Secure Coverage and Reimbursement:** Work with payors and stakeholders to ensure that cardiothoracic (CT) procedures are covered and reimbursed appropriately.
- **Ensure Procedures Occur in Appropriate Care Settings:** Advocate for policies that require CT procedures to be performed in appropriate care settings with the necessary resources to ensure patient safety.
- **Reduce Administrative Burdens:** Reform prior authorization requirements that impede access to care.
- **Advocate for Effective Medicare Payment Models:** Refine value-based payment models and advocate inclusion of STS quality measures to ensure fair and accurate measurement.

## ENHANCE PATIENT ACCESS TO LUNG CANCER SCREENINGS AND TREATMENT

- **Advance the STS Mobile Lung Cancer Screening Initiative:** Advocate for funding and resources to support mobile lung cancer screening programs and increase access to early detection.
- **Maintain Preventative Coverage:** Ensure coverage of lung cancer screening based on the best evidence available without administrative hurdles like prior authorization or cost-sharing for patients.

## PROTECT THE SURGEONS ROLE ON THE HEART TEAM

- **Foster Collaboration:** Ensure that Medicare coverage requires a cardiothoracic surgeon's involvement on the heart team for patient selection and procedures.
- **Advance Access to Innovative Treatments:** Highlight the critical role of CT surgeons in ensuring patient access to cutting-edge therapies while upholding the highest standards of safety.

## REDUCE BARRIERS TO CONGENITAL AND PEDIATRIC CARE

- **Protect Access to Congenital and Pediatric Cardiac Surgical Care:** Strengthen the specialized surgical workforce and policies that support care for children and adults with congenital heart disease.

## ADDRESS THE GROWING WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

- **Invest in Training Cardiothoracic Surgeons:** Support raising the cap on Medicare-supported residency positions and providing support for surgeons in training.
- **End Physician Non-Compete Agreements:** Protect policies that end non-compete agreements and prohibit artificial barriers for employed physicians.
- **Improve Physician Wellness:** Promote programs that foster resilience, reduce burnout, and provide comprehensive wellness benefits.

## MAXIMIZE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STS NATIONAL DATABASE

- **Secure Access to Claims Data:** Enable clinician-led registries to utilize federal claims data for assessing care quality, efficacy, and accelerating patient access to innovative treatments.
- **Illustrate the Benefits of Real-World Evidence:** Use the ACC/STS TVT Registry™ to demonstrate the positive impact of real-world data on policy decisions and Coverage with Evidence Development.
- **Advance Interoperability and Standardization:** Promote interoperable data systems and standardized elements such as imaging formats and unique device identifiers.

## PRESERVE HEALTHCARE RESEARCH FUNDING

- **Support Research Funding Through Appropriations:** Maintain or increase research funding for federal agencies and programs, such as but not limited to, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Lung Cancer Research Program.

*\*The order of policies above does not indicate their relative priority.*