BACKGROUND

Once again, physicians face cuts to their Medicare payments in 2024 unless Congress acts to prevent them. The new cuts will be 3.36% starting Jan. 1, 2024, on top of the 2.5% cuts that took effect this year.

These cuts sting practices trying to stay viable and care for the most vulnerable patients – older adults and people with disabilities.

The Medicare physician fee schedule continues to be highly flawed because it fails to keep up with inflation. Between 2001 and 2023, Medicare physician payments decreased by 26% when adjusted for inflation, while Medicare payments to hospitals and other health care facilities generally have kept pace with inflation, according to the American Medical Association. Over the same period, the consumer price index for physician services in U.S. cities increased by 65%.

Compounded by previous cuts, supply shortages, and inflation, the result of these pay cuts for physician practices is devastating.
A SOLUTION

The AMA House of Delegates this year unanimously adopted a new initiative – largely informed by a Texas Medical Association-authored resolution – directing the national association to take more tangible steps toward declaring Medicare physician payment reform “an urgent advocacy and legislative priority.” The “Fix Medicare Now” resolution directs AMA to:

- Prioritize “significant increases” in federal and state advocacy budgets; and
- Implement a comprehensive advocacy campaign, including a sustained media strategy engaging physicians and patients.

A bill in Congress, the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (HR 2474), is a great start. Congress should pass this bipartisan bill to reform this broken system and help ensure physicians are receiving inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers receive.

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) voted unanimously in mid-January 2023 to urge Congress to increase Medicare payments to physicians as well as to other health care sectors.

TMA strongly supports AMA principles to guide wholesale reform, The Characteristics of a Rational Medicare Physician Payment System, which call on Congress to:

- Provide a baseline annual physician pay raise to keep up with inflation;
- Eliminate, replace, or revise budget neutrality requirements;
- Incentivize value-based care that suits various practice settings; and
- Support physician efforts to reduce health disparities.

These actions and recommendations are a start. Congress should pass HR 2474, now. Ultimately, TMA strongly urges Congress to find permanent, sensible solutions to the Medicare physician payment system.

Bottom line: Federal spending must not be balanced on the backs of patients, physicians, and other health care professionals. Congress must take action to stop further physician payment cuts and meaningfully overhaul the broken Medicare system.
HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

TMA created this toolkit to empower physicians, county medical societies, and TMA Alliance members with the information they need to stop the Medicare physician pay cut and advocate for this solution. These resources are for your traditional and social media channels: messages, sample letters to the editor, and social media graphics and posts. TMA urges your active participation in this crucial advocacy effort.

1. Copy and paste social media post(s) to your social media accounts or use the talking points to craft your own message(s). One to two Facebook posts and three to five tweets per week are customary.

2. Download the social media graphics by clicking on the graphic in the toolkit, which links to a TMA webpage; selecting the graphic; and then right-clicking to copy or save it to your computer for use in a social media post.

TALKING POINTS

STOP MEDICARE PHYSICIAN PAYMENT CUTS; SUPPORT HR 2474

• Unless Congress acts, physicians’ Medicare payments will be cut approximately 3.36% beginning on Jan. 1, 2024, on top of 2.5% cuts that occurred this year.

• This is nothing new. Physicians have faced Medicare pay cuts most every year for two decades. Congress has failed to enact a permanent solution.

• The American Medical Association, Texas Medical Association, and other physician groups have declared Medicare physician payment reform an urgent, top advocacy and legislative priority.

• Congress should pass House Resolution 2474, the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act. It is a bipartisan bill to reform the broken Medicare system and help ensure physicians receive inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers receive.

• Medicare inflation-adjusted payments to physicians declined 26% from 2001 to 2023. Meanwhile, hospital payments matched inflation. Over the same period, the consumer price index for physician services in U.S. cities increased by 65%.

• Congress must stop physicians’ Medicare payment cuts. Slashing physician payments is not the way to treat our valued Medicare patients or the physicians who care for them.

• Medicare patients count on their physicians to be there when they need them in doctors’ offices, clinics, and hospitals. Congress must not let them down.

• Year after year Congress has not enacted a permanent solution so physicians can continue to treat Medicare patients. The health and care of our most vulnerable patients – older adults and people with disabilities – is in jeopardy.

• Nearly 20% of Americans are covered by Medicare. They are most susceptible to chronic illnesses and infectious diseases like COVID-19 and other illnesses.

• Medicare patients pay into the system all their working lives to have health insurance and access to their doctor. Our government must honor this agreement.
SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Physicians: please submit a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. You may use one of these or customize it to your story/perspective.

LETTER 1

[DATE], 2023

I am a local physician who enjoys caring for my Medicare patients. This January, Medicare payments for seeing these wonderful – yet often vulnerable – patients will be cut. This 3.36% reduction might not sound like much, but it’s on top of a 2.5% cut that hit in early 2023, plus many other similar cuts nearly every year for the past two decades.

Medicare patients pay into the system all their working lives to have health insurance and access to their doctor.

Yet every year physicians face a pay cut because the system is broken and underfunded. In fact, physicians have not received a Medicare cost-of-business increase in more than 20 years, effectively resulting in a 26% decrease in Medicare payments since 2001.

Because of this, the government forces physicians into tough decisions about whether to stop seeing Medicare patients. Our patients deserve better, and so do we.

We all must urge Congress to pass legislation this year to stop the cut and enact a permanent fix. Congress should pass the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (House Resolution 2474), a bipartisan bill that would reform this broken system and help ensure physicians are receiving inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers.

Please visit American Medical Association website to learn more and take action to save Medicare.

[Signature]
[Physician’s specialty, city]
LETTER 2

I’m concerned about the latest cuts planned for Medicare payments to physicians – scheduled for Jan. 1, 2024 – and you should be too. Nearly every year, physicians are forced to beg Congress to pass emergency legislation to stop planned cuts to our payments for caring for Medicare patients. In 2022, it was a 10% cut. This year it was a 2.5% cut, and in 2024 it’ll be an additional 3.36% cut.

Whether one big cut or a bunch of little ones, it all adds up to the same thing: Medicare patients’ ability to find a physician to care for them is once again in jeopardy unless Congress acts before year-end.

My older adult patients deserve better. You deserve better. I deserve better.

Congress: Stop the cuts, and enact a permanent, reliable Medicare physician payment system that keeps up with inflation and practice costs. Pass the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (House Resolution 2474) to reform this broken system and help ensure physicians receive inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers.

Fix this Medicare mess and preserve access to care!

[Signature]

[Physician’s specialty, city]

LETTER 3

We physicians are problem-solvers who diagnose patients’ ailments and find remedies. If your problem persisted for 20 years with no remedy, you might seek another doctor.

Yet every year that’s what physicians and patients face with the ailing Medicare physician payment system. For more than 20 years, Congress has not established a stable fix so doctors can continue caring for the nation’s most vulnerable patients – older adults and those with disabilities.

Here we go again: Without congressional intervention before year end, physicians who care for Medicare patients will see a payment reduction of 3.36% starting next year. We’ve seen cuts this year and last year too; our Medicare payments have fallen most every year since 2001.

This happens because congressional Medicare policies focus more on the budget than on patients and their physicians. They care more about federal spending than they do about you and me.

Enough.

Congress: Stop these Medicare cuts, and enact a permanent, reliable Medicare physician payment system that keeps up with inflation and practice costs.

Fix this Medicare mess and preserve access to care for my patients!

[Signature]

[Physician’s specialty, city]
TMA OP-ED

As physicians, we’re problem-solvers, diagnosing our patients’ ailments and finding remedies. We establish a treatment plan.

Imagine if your problem persisted for 20 years with no solution; you might seek another doctor.

Yet every year, that’s the scenario physicians and patients face with the failing Medicare physician payment system: For more than two decades, Congress has not passed a suitable, stable fix so doctors can continue caring for the nation’s older adults and those with disabilities.

Yet here we go again: Physicians face cuts to their Medicare payments in 2024 unless Congress acts to prevent them. The new cuts will be approximately 3.36% starting Jan. 1, 2024, on top of the 2.5% cuts that took effect in 2023. The culprit is a patchwork of congressional Medicare policies that don’t keep pace with Medicare expenses and put physician payments on the chopping block.

The current Medicare physician payment policy fails to keep up with inflation. According to an analysis of Medicare Trustees data by the American Medical Association (AMA), physician payments actually declined by 26% between 2001 and 2023, when adjusted for inflation.

Physicians are the only ones whose Medicare payments do not automatically adjust to reflect inflation every year, unlike inpatient and outpatient hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, skilled nursing centers, and other providers.

Instead, each year – for decades now – physicians treating Medicare patients have had to beg Congress to enact emergency patches to pull them and their patients from the brink – because there is no permanent, stable fix. And Congress enacts the bare minimum.

The result: Physicians caring for fragile patients are essentially losing practice revenue each year.

These deepening pay reductions put practices – and patients’ access to care – in jeopardy.

Can doctors leave the program? Yes. But most of us choose not to because we love caring for our Medicare patients. Physicians, however – just like any other business – have their breaking point. Facing high inflation, staffing challenges, and other pressures, this just might be it for doctors.

Medicare patients and their physicians deserve better!

Fortunately, some members of Congress have a solution. Several physician-lawmakers have introduced the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (House Resolution 2474), a bipartisan bill that would reform this broken system and help ensure physicians are receiving inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers.

This legislation won’t solve all the problems with the Medicare physician payment system, but it is a solid start to begin bridging the gap between what it truly costs to provide care and the payments Medicare administers.
This issue affects many people. Nearly one in five Americans is covered by Medicare (almost 20%). They’re most susceptible to chronic illnesses and infectious diseases – like COVID-19. You probably know them; they’re your loved ones, your family members. Or maybe you.

Medicare patients count on their physicians when they need them. We tend to these precious patients’ health care needs, managing their blood pressure and medications. It’s our honor to do so.

The Texas Medical Association, AMA, and other medical societies are calling for wholesale, permanent Medicare reform. Patients and their doctors deserve a stable, reliable, predictable Medicare physician payment system.

Until then, partial relief is better than no relief.

HR 2474 is a smart solution that will get us one step closer to a more rational, stable Medicare payment system – one that ensures financial stability, enshrines predictability, and promotes value-based care. It will safeguard patients’ access to local doctors’ offices so that people in small and rural communities, in particular, can continue receiving care close to home.

I encourage members of the Texas congressional delegation to cosponsor and support immediate passage of the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (HR 2474), to help protect and fortify our Medicare patients’ access to care.

It’s time for Congress to act.

Rick W. Snyder II, MD
President
Texas Medical Association
ACTION ALERT *(TAKE ACTION NOW)*

MESSAGE FROM THE TMA PRESIDENT

Unless Congress acts soon, you and our colleagues might AGAIN face another Medicare payment cut – approximately 3.36% starting Jan. 1, 2024. That cut is on top of the 2.5% cut that took effect this year.

Act now and send a strong message to Congress.

Ask your U.S. representative to cosponsor the “Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act,” House Resolution 2474. HR 2474 is a bipartisan bill to fix your broken Medicare payment system and ensure you receive inflationary updates, like hospitals and other Medicare providers do. Congress must fix this two-decades-old issue and develop a permanent, reliable Medicare physician payment system that guarantees financial stability and predictability and promotes value-based care.

Sincerely,

Rick W. Snyder II, MD
President
Texas Medical Association

MEDICINE’S GRASSROOTS MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

I am a Texas physician whom you represent. I urge you to stop the planned Medicare physician payment cuts from taking effect in 2024, and support House Resolution 2474. You have the power to prevent this travesty and help older adults and people with disabilities in Texas receive timely, needed health care.

Please establish a rational Medicare physician payment system that ensures financial stability and predictability and promotes value-based care.

Act today and cosponsor HR 2474, the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act, a bipartisan bill that would reform this broken system and help ensure physicians receive inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers do.

Physicians have not received a Medicare cost-of-business increase in more than two decades – unlike any other profession. Physician payments have declined by 26% between 2001 and 2023, when adjusted for inflation. What other professionals have had to endure that?

Don’t balance federal spending on the backs of Medicare patients and the physicians who care for them.

Physicians are struggling to sustain their medical practices with supply shortages, staffing challenges, and inflation.

Cutting Medicare physician payment rates and forcing physicians out of the Medicare program or into retirement literally adds insult to injury.

Please prevent the Medicare physician payment cut and support a permanent, stable solution.

Establish a permanent, reliable Medicare physician payment system that keeps up with inflation and practice costs; SUPPORT HR 2474.

Do what’s right for your Medicare-patient constituents who have paid into the system their entire working lives. Preserve their ability to see a physician.

Thank you for your consideration.
• Congress’ budget gimmicks require yet another round of cuts to Medicare physician pay in January 2024 – threatening Medicare patients’ ability to receive timely health care. #ProtectMedicarePatients #TMAadvocacy

• Medicare pay has not kept pace and fell 26% since 2001. #Congress must enact a permanent Medicare physician payment solution; support HR 2474. #TMAadvocacy #FixMedicareNow

• Driving physicians out of practice harms patients, but a new planned #Medicare physician payment cut might do just that. A new Texan-inspired, AMA plan will fight back. #FixMedicareNow #TMAadvocacy

• Vulnerable Medicare patients might not get the health care they need if Congress cuts physician pay again as planned in 2024. Who will treat older adults and people with disabilities then? #ProtectMedicarePatients #TMAadvocacy

• Congress: Pass HR 2474 to reform the broken Medicare system and help ensure physicians receive inflationary updates, just like other Medicare providers. #FixMedicareNow #ProtectMedicarePatients

• Tell #Congress: STOP the #Medicare physician payment cuts and pass HR 2474! Contact your federal legislators today. Another payment cut after decades of no increases jeopardizes access to health care & adds insult to injury. #FixMedicareNow #TMAadvocacy

• Since 2001, PHYSICIANS’ Medicare inflation-adjusted payments FELL 26%, while Medicare HOSPITAL health payments KEPT PACE with inflation. Meanwhile, physicians’ cost of doing business increased 65%. #Congress: Support HR 2474! #FixMedicareNow #TMAadvocacy

• Physicians’ Medicare pay will drop again in 2024, after years of cuts. It’s unfair: 2001-23, Medicare doctor inflation-adjusted payments fell 26% while others’ health care pay kept pace. #Congress must enact a permanent Medicare physician payment solution. #TMAadvocacy

• After years of cuts, physicians treating Medicare patients face another Medicare pay cut in 2024. We must protect access to care for older adults and people with disabilities. #ProtectMedicarePatients #TMAadvocacy
SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHICS

CUTTING MEDICARE PHYSICIANS’ PAYMENTS MEANS...

SMALLER STAFFS, LONGER WAIT TIMES FOR PATIENT VISITS.

(Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice, 1,381 responses, Sept. 28, 2021.)

ENACT FAIR PHYSICIAN MEDICARE PAYMENTS!
Ensure older adults and people with disabilities can see their doctor.

Physicians’ inflation-adjusted MEDICARE PAYMENTS FELL 26% SINCE 2001, with another cut planned for 2024.

#FixMedicareNow
TELL CONGRESS:
Fix Medicare now.
Pass HR 2474 to end annual physician payment cuts!

PRESERVE PATIENTS’ ABILITY TO FIND A DOCTOR TO CARE FOR THEM.
Don’t cut Medicare patients’ physicians’ payments AGAIN!

STOP CUTTING MEDICARE
Medicare patients deserve access to their physician.
Ask Congress to pass Medicare payment reform TODAY.