MEDICARE CUTS
INSULT UPON INJURY
TEXAS MEDICAL ASSOCIATION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT
BACKGROUND

A nearly 10% Medicare physician payment cut will take effect Jan. 1, 2022, unless Congress acts today.

The Medicare Physician Fee Schedule has failed to keep up with inflation. In fact, when adjusted for inflation, Medicare payments to physicians have declined 22% from 2001 to 2020. Physicians caring for the most vulnerable patients – senior citizens and people with disabilities – are essentially losing practice revenue with each Medicare patient they treat.

Compound that simple arithmetic with the turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the result has been economic devastation for many physicians.

Yet current law requires a nearly 10% pay cut in the new year for physicians treating Medicare patients:

• A 3.75% reduction to the 2022 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule conversion factor;
• A 2% across-the-board sequestration cut, which Congress has delayed several times before and during the pandemic; and
• An additional 4% sequestration cut resulting from the trillions of dollars in COVID-19 relief funds spent through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Federal spending absolutely must not be balanced on the backs of physicians, other health care professionals, and patients. Congress must be told in no uncertain terms: Payment cuts to physicians of almost 10% will significantly and adversely impact health care, physicians, and the vulnerable patients they treat.

TMA created this toolkit to arm physicians, county medical societies, and alliance members with the information they need to stop the Medicare physician payment cut. The following resources are for your traditional and social media channels: messages, polling data, sample letters to the editor, a sample op-ed, social media graphics and posts, and an Action Alert to send directly to legislators. TMA urges your active participation in this crucial advocacy effort.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

1. Copy and paste social media post(s) to your social media accounts or feel free to 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 itself, then right-clicking to copy or save to your computer for use in a social media post.

3. Send the news release, a letter to the editor, or the op-ed to your local newspaper.

4. Click on the links in the Action Alert to email your U.S. Senators and Representative.

You can also find these toolkit elements on TMA's Advocacy page or in CMS Resources.
**TALKING POINTS**

**MEDICARE CUTS: INSULT UPON INJURY – STOP MEDICARE PHYSICIAN PAYMENT CUTS**

- Unless Congress acts NOW, physicians’ Medicare payments will be cut nearly 10% on Jan. 1, 2022.
- There also are even deeper potential penalties stemming from Medicare’s Merit-Based Incentive Payment System that could cut some physicians’ payments as much as 18% for services rendered in 2022.
- These cuts hurt physicians at a time when they already are reeling from the impacts of the pandemic. Physicians are exhausted and have had to use their own savings and capital to keep their patients, themselves, and their staff safe with extra infection control and personal protective equipment.
- Many physicians pivoted their practices and invested in telemedicine so their patients could see them from the comfort and safety of home.
- Cuts to physician payments are not the way to treat physicians who’ve sacrificed tirelessly on the front lines of the pandemic for 19 months. Congress can and must stop the payment cut.
- If physicians cannot stay in business, they cannot continue to treat Medicare patients. The health of our nation’s most vulnerable patients – seniors and the disabled – will be jeopardized at one of the worst times in history.
- We’re talking about a sizable portion of the U.S. population—nearly 20% are covered by Medicare—who are most susceptible to chronic illnesses and infectious diseases like COVID-19. The pandemic already has exposed deep health disparities and access-to-care problems for racial and ethnic minorities.
- Physicians are retiring because of exhaustion and stress brought on by the pandemic. The nearly 10% physician payment cut could be the last straw – the one that finally kicks physicians out of the Medicare system.
- It’s hard enough for physicians to sustain their medical practice without the economic implications wrought by an ongoing public health emergency. Due to delayed preventive care and postponed elective surgeries, about half of physicians have seen an income reduction due to the pandemic. Physicians treating Medicare patients haven’t gotten a cost-of-business increase in 20 years – unlike any other profession – adding insult to financial injury.
- Patients are counting on their physicians being there for them in the doctors’ offices, clinics, and hospitals.

**SURVEY RESULTS**

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

- **93% of Texas physicians currently accept Medicare patients.**

If the nearly 10% Medicare physician payment cuts take effect, **Texas physicians are considering** taking the following actions:

- **62%**: Not accepting new Medicare patients
- **59%**: Opting out of Medicare altogether
- **43%**: Retiring
- **42%**: Ending existing Medicare patient relationships
- Cutting Medicare physician payments means smaller staffs, longer wait times, and shorter patient visits.
SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS FOR FACEBOOK/TWITTER

Facebook: One to two per week
Twitter: Three to five per week

HASHTAGS:

#DontCutMedicare
#StopMedicareCuts
#ProtectMedicare
#CuttingMedicareHurtsPatients
#CuttingMedicareCutsCare
#TMAadvocacy

• Congress’ budget gimmicks to pay for Medicare physician services reqs a nearly 10% cut in 2022, harming Medicare pts’ ability to receive timely health care. Congress must NOT balance federal spending on the backs of doctors treating Medicare pts. #ProtectMedicare #TMAadvocacy

• Physicians treating Medicare patients are set for a nearly double-digit-percent pay CUT during a pandemic. Protect access to care for seniors and people with disabilities. Protect Medicare. #StopMedicareCuts
#CuttingMedicareHurtsPatients #TMAadvocacy

• Nearly 2/3 of physicians say they would consider not accepting new Medicare patients if Congress goes thru w/nearly 10% Medicare pymt cut in Jan. Don’t take health care away from seniors, people w/disabilities. Stop the Medicare payment cut #CuttingMedicareCutsCare #TMAadvocacy

• Medicare physician pymts haven’t kept up w/ inflation in decades, actually declining 22% from 2001-20. Now Congress wants to cut their payments another 10% in the middle of a pandemic to the detriment of patient care. #DontCutMedicare #TMAadvocacy

• Congress must shore up Medicare and access to health care for seniors and people with disabilities. Don’t force physicians to abandon their patients and their profession. Stop the Medicare payment cuts. #ProtectMedicare #StopMedicareCuts #TMAadvocacy

• Driving physicians out of practice helps no one, esp patients. But another cut to #Medicare physician pymts may do just that. Take action now. Tell #Congress: #stopthecuts before it’s too late & patients lose access to their doctors & doctors lose their livelihoods. #TMAadvocacy

• Vulnerable Medicare patients won’t be able to get health care when they need it if Congress slashes Medicare physician payments by nearly 10%. Who will treat seniors and people with disabilities then? #StopMedicareCuts
#CuttingMedicareCutsCare #TMAadvocacy

• Nearly half of physicians say they’ll consider retiring w/yet another Medicare payment cut, especially one imposed during a pandemic. Medicare patients – nearly 20% of US population – will likely struggle to find timely care. #ProtectMedicare #StopMedicareCuts #TMAadvocacy

• 93% of TX physicians currently treat Medicare patients. 59% are considering opting out of treating them if the nearly 10% physician payment cut isn’t stopped. This will significantly hamper Medicare patients’ ability to receive timely health care. #StopMedicareCuts #TMAadvocacy

• More than 40% of Texas physicians are considering ending existing Medicare patient relationships if Congress does not stop the almost 10% physician payment cut taking effect Jan. 1. Who will treat Texas’ most vulnerable patients then? #CuttingMedicareHurtsPatients #TMAadvocacy

• Tell #Congress: STOP the #Medicare physician payment cuts! Contact your federal legislators today. Another payment cut after decades of no increases jeopardizes access to health care & adds insult to injury. Take action today to prevent more Medicare cuts. #TMAadvocacy
93% of Texas physicians currently accept Medicare patients. (Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice; 1,381 responses. Sept. 28, 2021.)

59% of Texas physicians are considering opting out of Medicare altogether. (Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice; 1,381 responses. Sept. 28, 2021.)

42% of Texas physicians are considering ending existing Medicare patient relationships. (Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice; 1,381 responses. Sept. 28, 2021.)

62% of Texas physicians are considering not accepting NEW Medicare patients. (Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice; 1,381 responses. Sept. 28, 2021.)

43% of Texas physicians are considering retirement. (Source: TMA survey of 54,602 Texas physicians in active practice; 1,381 responses. Sept. 28, 2021.)

WHAT PHYSICIANS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE MEDICARE PAYMENT CUTS:

“A 10% cut would put us out of business.”

“What physicians are saying about the Medicare payment cuts:

“...I will retire within the year.”

“I will likely make a career change...”

SMALLER STAFFS, LONGER WAIT TIMES, AND SHORTER PATIENT VISITS.

CUTTING MEDICARE PHYSICIAN PAYMENTS MEANS...
SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHICS FOR
FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND LINKEDIN

93% of Texas physicians currently accept Medicare patients.

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“A 10% cut would put us out of business.”

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SMALLER STAFFS, LONGER WAIT TIMES, AND SHORTER PATIENT VISITS.
November 00, 2021

Medicare Cuts Would Threaten Patients’ Access to Care

Nearly Two-Thirds of Doctors Say They Could Be Forced to Stop Taking New Medicare Patients

Texas Medicare patients could soon struggle to get a physician’s care if planned Medicare payment cuts take place on Jan. 1.

According to a new Texas Medical Association (TMA) survey, the nearly 10% Medicare pay cut Congress has scheduled for the new year could devastate physicians who care for the senior citizens and people with disabilities covered by the federal health insurer.

“We’re talking about a sizable and ever-growing portion of the aging U.S. population in Medicare – folks who are most susceptible to chronic illnesses and infectious diseases like COVID-19 – who could end up without access to a doctor,” said TMA President E. Linda Villarreal, MD.

“I will have to strongly consider limiting, or stopping, my availability to Medicare patients,” if the cuts take place, said a Texas family physician in the TMA survey. “This is hard to stomach, as I feel a duty to care for all people regardless of age or payor status.”

The physician speaks for many: If the cuts take effect, nearly two-thirds (62%) of Texas physicians say they could be forced to stop seeing any new Medicare patients.

What’s more, 59% of physicians polled said they would consider opting out of Medicare altogether; 43% may contemplate retirement; and 42% might even have to stop seeing their existing Medicare patients.

“Physicians need additional support right now – not a pay cut,” said Dr. Villarreal. Many physicians also say the cuts add insult to injury as Texas faces the 19th month of COVID-19 stress and disruptions that already pushed their practices to the brink.

“We are already exhausted from a year and a half of a pandemic and now to hear of a cut like this would place massive strains on my small practice,” said Stephen Yang, MD. “I fear that actions like these will eventually cause more and more solo/small practice doctors to hang it up. This type of action gives me dread.”

Ophthalmologist Dean Porter, MD, said the cuts would “threaten the ability of physicians to provide care for America’s most vulnerable.” Physicians’ Medicare payments have not been raised to meet cost-of-living hikes in 20 years. “Physicians have rolled with the punches and taken more than a few for the team for decades,” Dr. Porter said. The Sugar Land physician said he fears the new cuts may force many doctors to “tap out.”

The 9.75% cut is a sum of three scheduled Medicare physician pay cuts. Only a congressional vote would stop each from taking effect.

Frank Saporito, MD, a Dallas dermatologist, intended to practice medicine for 10 more years, but the planned Medicare cut will force him to retire next year. “By cutting Medicare, Congress has sent physicians and senior citizens a clear message – you are expendable,” he said.

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Connect with TMA on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nov. XX, 2021
Stop the Cut! Medicare Patients Deserve Better

Unless Congress acts soon, Medicare patients’ access to care is in jeopardy.
I love that I have the privilege of caring for my senior citizen and disabled patients. I’ve cared for many of them for decades, and now I’m caring for their sons, daughters, and grandchildren.

Today, Congress is jeopardizing their health care by cutting physicians’ Medicare payment by nearly 10% during a worldwide pandemic! Let’s face it: If the 10% cut happens on Jan. 1, I don’t know how many physicians can continue to treat Medicare patients or accept new ones. About half of physicians have seen an income reduction due to the pandemic … and now this.

Our senior citizens and disabled patients deserve better. They have paid into Medicare for years and deserve to have a physician in charge of their care.

Medicare seniors are the silent generation, baby boomers, and the greatest generation. Congress must ensure they all continue to have physicians to care for them in their time of greatest need.

[Signature]
[Physician’s specialty, city]

Nov. X, 2021
Physicians to Congress: Don’t Harm Our Medicare Patients

I was shocked and dismayed to learn that current federal law requires a cut in physicians’ pay for caring for Medicare patients by nearly 10% on Jan. 1, 2022.

To face this threat is troubling enough in a normal year, but it is the ultimate insult now, when physicians have labored under unthinkable pressures for the past 19 months caring for our patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. We love treating Texas’ senior citizens and people with disabilities (the people Medicare covers) and have done everything we can to keep them healthy and safe from the coronavirus.

Now this? This is the “thank you” we receive from Congress?

I urge our federal lawmakers to do the right thing before it’s too late: Stop these Medicare cuts NOW so our Medicare patients can continue to have physicians to care for them when they need them the most.

[Signature]
[Physician’s specialty, city]
SAMPLE OP-ED

MEDICARE CUTS AN INSULT TO PATIENTS AND PHYSICIANS

What would you do if your employer cut your pay by 10% during one of the most stressful times in recent history? And what if your company did that after not giving you a cost-of-living raise for more than two decades?

Well, now you have an idea of how we [physicians] feel about Congress’ plan to cut our Medicare payments by nearly 10% starting in January. It could be worse: Combined with other penalties in the program, the reductions in Medicare payments for services provided in 2022 could be as much as 18% for some doctors.

These are physicians taking care of the nation’s elderly and disabled patients during their most vulnerable time – a pandemic. These are doctors already reeling from the impacts of a 19-month-long public health emergency. They’re exhausted, and they’ve had to dip into their personal savings and capital to keep themselves and patients safe with extra infection control, personal protective equipment, and costly investments in telemedicine for patients who can’t be seen in the office or a typical clinical setting.

This is not the way to reward our physicians who’ve sacrificed tirelessly. It’s like pouring salt on a wounded workforce. Worse than the insult to doctors is the insult to Medicare patients who will suffer when physicians can no longer care for them.

Already, the pandemic has forced some physicians to close their doors and has precipitated early retirements: A 2021 Physicians Foundation survey showed that nearly a quarter of Texas doctors are considering retiring within the next year. A 2021 Texas Medical Association survey showed that nearly all (93%) Texas physicians currently accept Medicare patients, yet, if the nearly 10% Medicare physician payment cuts aren’t stopped, 59% are considering opting out of Medicare altogether. Almost two-thirds – 62% – said they are considering not accepting new Medicare patients, and 42% said they are considering ending existing Medicare patient relationships. Due to delayed preventive care and postponed elective surgeries, about half of physicians have seen an income reduction due to the pandemic.

Physicians need support right now – not a pay cut. Especially not when we’re talking about a sizable and ever-growing portion of the aging U.S. population in Medicare – folks who are most susceptible to chronic illnesses and infectious diseases like COVID-19 – who could end up without access to a doctor. Not when the pandemic already has exposed deep health disparities and access-to-care problems for racial and ethnic minorities – and for senior citizens.

Some of my most cherished patients are covered by Medicare and have been seeing me for decades. I could hear the fear in one patient’s voice when he asked recently if I was going to retire. I’ve been seeing this patient for 25 years. He counts on me.

We do this because we love taking care of our patients. We do this despite the fact that Medicare has not given us a cost-of-living increase since 2001 – unlike any other profession. Even hospitals are not subject to these types of cuts. And I’ve been doing this long enough to remember some of my colleagues being pushed to the brink and putting up yard signs saying they were no longer taking Medicare patients, because Congress threatened to cut their pay year after year back then, too.

Here we go again.

It’s hard enough to sustain a medical practice these days. Another round of cuts would bleed our physicians dry, and patient access to care will suffer. It’s time for this to stop; time to apply pressure where it’s needed. Congress can and must stop these Medicare physician payment cuts.

E. Linda Villarreal, MD
President, Texas Medical Association
ACTION ALERT

You and many of your colleagues will receive a nearly 10% cut to your Medicare physician payments if Congress does not act today.

Under current federal law, a nearly 10% Medicare physician payment cut takes effect Jan. 1. Combined with other potential Medicare Merit-Based Incentive Payment System penalties, the reduction could be as much as 18% for some doctors providing services in 2022. It’s unconscionable, especially since you have not had a cost-of-living increase for more than two decades.

Forcing physicians to absorb a sizable payment cut, when they have labored under unthinkable pressures for the past 19 months caring for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, threatens Medicare beneficiaries’ access to health care as you and your colleagues contemplate whether you can continue to treat Medicare patients or even keep your practice operating.

Please stop what you are doing and take action right now. U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz and your representative must hear from you today on why physicians cannot absorb a Medicare physician pay cut. It only takes a minute to email or tweet your message through TMA’s Grassroots Action Center.

The message is simple: Cuts to Medicare physician payments during a pandemic quite literally add insult to injury for patients and physicians. The cuts cannot take effect.

Senators Cornyn and Cruz and your representative must hear from you today.

Sincerely,

E. Linda Villarreal, MD
President
Texas Medical Association
RESOURCES
TEXAS MEDICAL ASSOCIATION ARTICLES AND
AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION INFORMATION

AMA: Wake up to financial peril facing Medicare payment system
Jul. 21, 2021

Congress must not take physicians’ Medicare pay to build bridges
Jul. 27, 2021

Hard work ahead to stop looming Medicare physician pay cuts
Aug. 11, 2021

Medicare Fee Schedule Cut, Quality Requirements
Unsustainable Amid Pandemic, TMA Tells CMS
Sept. 24, 2021

Impending Medicare Pay Cuts Total Nearly 10%
Sept. 28, 2021

Medicare Cuts an Insult to Patients and Physicians
Oct. 13, 2021

Survey: Medicare Cuts Could Force Physicians
to Drop Care Even Amid Pandemic
Oct. 19, 2021

Solid House majority back stopping Medicare physician pay cliff
Oct. 21, 2021

Medicare Cuts Would Threaten Patients’ Access to Care
Oct. 27, 2021

Congressional Members Support Halt to Medicare Cuts
Nov. 1, 2021