

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
1035 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers,

As your constituent, I ask that you please cosponsor H.R. 5536, the Stabilizing Medicare Access to Rehabilitation and Therapy Act, the SMART Act, sponsored by Rep. Bobby Rush and Rep. Jason Smith. This bipartisan legislation is aimed at protecting Medicare beneficiary access to physical therapy by mitigating the impact of the impending 15% payment differential for services furnished by a physical therapist assistant under Medicare Part B beginning on Jan. 1, 2022.

The 15% cut is in addition to other reductions to the Medicare fee schedule, including the cuts made to a wide range of health care disciplines, including physical therapy, to offset the recent boost in payment to primary care physicians for E/M services. This included a 3.3% cut in 2021 and a proposed 3.5% cut for 2022. These multiple cuts, along with the 15% PTA payment differential, are simply not sustainable in ensuring access to therapy services.

The proposed SMART Act would implement three common-sense policies to mitigate the impact of the PTA payment differential. It would:

1. Provide an exemption to the 15% payment differential for rural and underserved areas. Rural and underserved areas tend to rely more heavily on physical therapist assistants to provide access to care. and they also face higher health care workforce challenges.
2. Reduce the current burdensome Medicare requirement for direct supervision of physical therapist assistants in outpatient practices settings by aligning Part B supervision with state law requirements. Medicare allows for general supervision of physical therapist assistants in all settings except for outpatient clinics. General supervision of physical therapist assistants is permitted in 44 states, making the current Medicare Part B regulation, which arbitrarily applies only to outpatient clinics, more burdensome than most state requirements.
3. Delay the payment differential just for one year, to Jan. 1, 2023. COVID-19 continues to impact physical therapy, with providers reporting high rates of burnout. Now is not the time to implement a cut of this magnitude for physical therapist assistants, especially given the other cuts to the Medicare fee schedule.

Access to health care services is critical to good health, yet Medicare beneficiaries, particularly those who reside in rural and underserved areas, face a variety of barriers. Unfortunately, the 15% payment reduction for services furnished by physical therapist assistants will have a detrimental impact on the ability of therapy providers, particularly in rural areas, to continue to deliver care.

Again, please cosponsor HR 5536. Thank you for your consideration.