



For Immediate Release
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AARP, CMS join forces to ensure access for Medicare, TRICARE patients

DENVER – AARP Colorado and the Colorado Medical Society urged the state’s congressional delegation today to ensure continued access to health care for the nearly 1 million Colorado seniors, military families and retirees who rely on Medicare and TRICARE.

If Congress does not act by the end of the year, Medicare and TRICARE physician payments will be cut by 25 percent on Jan. 1, 2011. In a joint letter sent to the Colorado delegation, AARP and CMS urged lawmakers to stop the 2011 cuts during this lame duck session, then begin working with AARP and organized medicine on a longer term, sustainable solution that will ensure seniors and the military receive the care they need.

“It is absolutely essential that lawmakers give our 650,000 Colorado members – as well as all Americans – the peace of mind they deserve when it comes to staying with a particular physician they have come to trust,” said Morie Smile, senior state director for AARP Colorado. “Seniors have earned this benefit.”

In a recent Colorado Medical Society survey, more than half the physicians polled said they would stop seeing Medicare patients, or would limit or stop seeing new Medicare patients should a cut of even 21 percent take effect.

“This is not a decision Colorado physicians take lightly,” said CMS President Mike Pramenko, MD. “Doctors want to continue taking care of these patients – that’s why we became doctors. But for many physicians, Congress’ inability to fix this problem has left them no other choice.”

Congress has postponed action on fixing the flawed Medicare funding formula repeatedly over the past decade and four times already this year. Today, Medicare payments are just 1 percent higher than they were in 2001. Since then, physician practice costs have increased 22 percent, as measured by the Medicare Economic Index.

A copy of the letter is attached.



The Honorable Mark Udall
Suite SD-B40E Dirksen Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Nov. 23, 2010

Dear Senator Udall:

For more than 40 years, our nation's seniors have relied on Medicare to cover their health care needs. Today, more than at any other time in recent history, that care is in jeopardy.

If Congress doesn't act by the end of the year, Medicare physician payments will be cut by 25 percent on Jan. 1, 2011, forcing many physicians to limit the number of new Medicare patients they see or to stop seeing Medicare patients entirely.

Such a failure to act by Congress would dramatically reduce access to care for more than 650,000 seniors and disabled people in Colorado, as well as for the approximately 230,000 active duty military, their families, and military retirees who rely on TRICARE.

Closing their doors to Medicare and TRICARE patients is not a decision Colorado physicians take lightly. Doctors want to continue taking care of these patients – that's why they became doctors. Yet repeatedly over the past decade and three times already this year, Congress has failed to fix this problem.

Today, Medicare payments are just 1 percent higher than they were in 2001. Since then, physician practice costs have increased 22 percent. As a result, more than half of the physicians polled in a recent Colorado Medical Society survey said they would no longer accept Medicare or would limit or stop taking new Medicare patients if a cut of even 21 percent were to take effect.

We don't have to tell you what this would mean for your constituents, your friends, your colleagues, and perhaps even your own families. At this time of great uncertainty in health care, the least we can do for our seniors and military is ensure their continued access to high quality care.

It is essential that Congress work together to ensure our physicians will not face cuts in 2011, while continuing to focus on finding a permanent fix. Our seniors and the members of our military deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

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