

Murphy, Doctors, and Seniors Rally to Support Improvements to Medicare

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WATERBURY, CONN. - With physicians threatening to walk away from Medicare due to abysmally low reimbursement rates for treating Medicare patients, today Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) pushed for approval of increases in these rates and other important improvements to Medicare recently passed by the House of Representatives to shore up the program. If the government doesn't act to halt a planned 10 percent cut in these rates, more than 485,000 Connecticut seniors on Medicare could be faced with less provider options and Connecticut physicians could lose \$230 million for the care of elderly and disabled patients over the next two years.

"Medicare can't survive unless we have physicians willing to be part of the program. Medicare provides a crucial healthcare network for seniors, and the doctors who provide these services won't provide care if they are losing money by being part of the program. I was proud to support a reimbursement rate increase for these doctors because without it, care for seniors throughout Connecticut would be jeopardized," said Murphy.

On August 1, the House passed the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act (CHAMP Act) that could improve Medicare for millions of seniors across the country and provide 5 million more low-income children with health coverage. Physicians are poised to take a 10 percent cut this year in reimbursement for treating Medicare patients. One of the most important improvements to Medicare in the bill could reverse that cut, allowing for a modest increase for physicians to stabilize Medicare for seniors.

The CHAMP Act creates a new comprehensive preventative benefit and for the first time in the program's history, puts seniors' mental health benefits on par with other medical needs. The bill also makes improvements to Medicare Part D by limiting out-of-pocket costs when seniors get hit by the "donut hole" coverage gap, allowing seniors to change plans mid-year when their plan changes its drug coverage, and eliminating late enrollment penalties that harm many vulnerable seniors.

The CHAMP Act also eliminates co-payments and deductibles for cancer, glaucoma and diabetes screenings as well as vaccines and many other vital check-ups and tests. It also ensures that seniors continue to have access to the doctor of their choice.

"Our seniors deserve the best quality medical care -- care that Connecticut physicians want to provide. We need these improvements to Medicare to be able to serve our patients and practice good preventive medicine," said Angelo S.

Carrabba, M.D., President of the Connecticut State Medical Society.

The House and Senate have not agreed on the final form of this legislation, and President Bush is threatening to veto it; however, Murphy has pledged to fight for its approval. Today, Murphy, physicians, and advocates for the elderly called for swift action to approve this bill so that Medicare can be bolstered for seniors and physicians. This is particularly important for Connecticut, which has a much high number of Medicare patients compared to other states -- 14 percent of Connecticut residents receive Medicare.

"The CHAMP bill includes the most comprehensive and extensive improvements in protections for Medicare beneficiaries in almost twenty years," said Pamela A. Meliso, JD, MPH, Senior Attorney, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

"This legislation is one of the most important pieces of healthcare legislation I have been involved with in my time in Congress. The fight isn't over, and I won't sit by and watch this bill fall apart because seniors and doctors deserve better," said Murphy.

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