

Colorado seniors need Congress to act on Medicare cuts formula: Choice of physicians at risk

- Colorado residents face several issues with choice of physicians and access to care: 9.3% of the state's residents live in a designated primary care shortage area; 13.7% report that they could not see a doctor in the last 12 months due to cost; there are 318 emergency department visits per 1,000 population in the state; and 23% of the state's Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and over live below 150% of the federal poverty level.
- On March 1, 2010, Colorado physicians face an across-the-board cut of 21.2%, with more cuts likely to follow over the next few years due to a flawed payment update formula, the Sustainable Growth Rate or SGR.
- By repealing the SGR formula, Congress can avert these cuts. SGR repeal would prevent a loss of \$120 million in 2010 for the care of elderly and disabled patients in Colorado. On average, legislation to repeal the SGR would prevent cuts of \$9,000 to each Colorado physician next year.
- 44,023 employees, 498,450 Medicare patients and 214,738 TRICARE patients in Colorado will be helped by the legislation that averts these cuts.
- 42 percent of Colorado's practicing physicians are over 50, an age at which surveys have shown many physicians consider reducing their patient care activities.
- Legislation is also needed to reinstate a temporary increase in Medicare geographic adjustments for certain areas which expired at the end of 2009. In 2010, therefore, the legislation would prevent an additional 0.7% cut in payment rates for Colorado physicians' Medicare services on top of the 21.2% cuts across the country.