

Stabilizing Medicare Access to Rehabilitation and Therapy (SMART) Act



Bipartisan legislation will protect vital segment of physical and occupational therapy workforce and help maintain patient access to care, especially in rural and underserved areas.

Physical and occupational therapist assistants (PTAs/OTAs) are an essential part of the therapy profession, providing direct patient care services to patients under the guidance and supervision of licensed physical therapists. Therapy assistants are hands-on, frontline professionals who administer direct patient care in the outpatient therapy practice setting. Despite the incredible value therapy assistants offer to patients, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently imposed a 15% Medicare payment cut on the direct patient care services provided by PTAs/OTAs—threatening the ability of practices to meet patient needs, particularly in rural areas.

With the physical therapy field experiencing a [34% reduction](#) in Medicare Physician Fee Schedule spending during the early months of the pandemic, additional cuts of 15% will only further restrict the ability of the profession to meet patients' pain management and recovery needs using the safest, most cost-effective care path.

Introduced in 2021 by Reps. Bobby Rush (D-IL) and Jason Smith (R-MO), the Stabilizing Medicare Access to Rehabilitation and Therapy (SMART) Act (H.R. 5536) would address patient-care challenges created by Medicare's most recent PTA/OTA payment cuts. Specifically, the bill would:

- Delay the implementation of payment cuts from January 1, 2022, until January 1, 2023, to allow providers more time to prepare.
- Permanently prevent application of the 15% Medicare cuts to services provided by PTAs and OTAs in rural and medically underserved areas.
- Reduce requirements for direct supervision of therapy assistants in private practice settings – shifting from direct to general supervision in states with licensure laws that allow for general supervision – helping to ensure continued patient access and giving small therapy practices more flexibility.

Medicare patients often rely on therapy assistants for their care, especially in rural and underserved areas. Given the high demand for physical therapy care and the unprecedented challenges caused by the pandemic, it is critical for Congress to avert these destabilizing Medicare cuts. To ensure patient access to physical therapy care in rural and underserved communities across America, Congress must pass the bipartisan SMART Act.

CONGRESS: Act Now to Support the SMART Act!