
October 5, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson

Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries

Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune

Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer

Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: The Patients First Act (H.R. 9693) is a Historic Opportunity to Stabilize Our Healthcare System and Strengthen Americans' Access to Care

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Leader Thune, and Leader Schumer,

The patient-physician relationship is one of the most trusted and sacred bonds. Each day, doctors provide patients hope, help, and healing. Primary care physicians are the ones Americans turn to when they feel something isn't right; specialty care providers help patients manage a wide range of chronic and rare diseases with life-changing consequences; and physicians are the backbone of care in any care setting.

Unfortunately, that care is increasingly difficult to access, and the future of our healthcare system is at real risk if current trends continue. As the collective voices of America's patient community, we are deeply concerned about the increasingly unstable Medicare system that is stifling patient access to care and are writing to express our strong support for the Patients First Act (H.R. 9693).

Over the last 25 years, Medicare reimbursement for physicians has been eroded away and is now a full-third (33%) below 2001 payment levels.¹ These cuts have been driven in part by budget neutrality rules that have not been updated in over thirty years. We've heard from many physicians that Medicare policies meant to improve value-based care—a worthy goal—have instead imposed significant administrative burdens and additional costs without meaningfully improving outcomes.

All this has coincided with a steep drop in the number of independent and private practices in the community, as well as a growing shortage of physicians nationwide.

These challenges are forecasted to get worse as the demand for quality care close to home grows. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the United States will face a shortfall of up to 86,000 doctors by 2036.² Many communities—especially in rural areas—are losing independent physicians and are federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas. For physicians remaining in the workforce, there have been increasing difficulties in maintaining practices, hiring new staff, expanding service offerings, and accepting new patients. As a result, Americans often face long wait times for an appointment or long travel times to see an available physician—symptoms of the structural flaws of the current Medicare system.

Congress has long recognized the problems. Over the years, leaders from both parties have worked diligently to push back against statutory cuts to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) and improve value-based care.

The Patients First Act is a promising and bipartisan culmination of that foundational work and represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to stabilize America's healthcare system and strengthen patient access. Therefore, the patient community is pleased to support this critical legislation and urges Congress to pass it this year.

Each of the bill's major provisions will improve care. Specifically, we support:

1. **Providing a permanent annual payment update linked to inflation.** Recognizing the relationship between artificially low Medicare reimbursement and patient access, a 2025 Medicare Trustees report said, "Absent a change in the delivery system or level of update by subsequent legislation, the Trustees expect access to Medicare-participating physicians to become a significant issue in the long term."³ By better reflecting increases in practice costs and linking physician reimbursement to the Medicare Economic Index, a measure of inflation, the Patients First Act will go a long way to stabilizing the Medicare system and Americans' access to doctors.
 2. **Updating antiquated budget neutrality policies.** Because Medicare must cut payments across the board whenever it adds or updates a service—using government estimates of how often that service will be utilized that are frequently too high and, under current law, are never corrected—physicians absorb needless cuts year after year. We strongly support the bill's requirement that Medicare compare those estimates against actual use and correct the difference, along with its long-overdue increase in the dollar threshold that triggers these cuts.
 3. **Empowering physicians to participate in value-based care models.** Instead of the overly burdensome reporting requirements and onerous penalties imposed by the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS), the Patients First Act would establish a Patient Outcome Improvement National Tabulation System (POINTS), which will allow medical professionals to help set quality measurement standards and create incentives for small and independent practices to improve care. Further, it would consider the savings physicians help generate by improving patient outcomes, preventing avoidable hospital admissions, and more.
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4. **Enacting smart reforms to alternative payment models.** This includes freezing the Qualifying Participant threshold at 50 percent for several years and exploring the challenges that prevent more physicians from participating in value-based care models. This will help identify ways that such models can be expanded strategically to improve care and lower costs.

As a diverse group of organizations advocating on behalf of America's patients, we are pleased to share our support for the Patients First Act (H.R. 9693) and kindly ask leadership to advance this bipartisan priority this year so that Americans can reap the benefits of a more stable, adaptive, and effective healthcare system.

Sincerely,

Signatories

Advocates for Compassionate Therapy Now
AliveandKick'n
Amyloidosis Army
American Chronic Pain Association
Brain Inflammation Collaborative
Cactus Cancer
Colon Cancer Coalition
Colorado Rare Disease Coalition
Color of Gastrointestinal Illnesses (COGI)
CURED Nfp
Functional Medicine Associates, LLC
Gastroparesis Patient Association
Infusion Access Foundation
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lyme Fight Foundation
National Infusion Center Association
One Cancer Place
Patient Mind, Inc.
Patients Rising
PWSA | USA - Prader-Willi Syndrome Association
Retire Safe
SAIA - Strategic Alliance for Intercultural Advocacy in GI
The Patient Helpline Foundation
The Steffens Scleroderma and Degos Disease Foundation

1. American Medical Association, "Medicare physician pay has plummeted since 2001 — find out why."
<https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/medicare-medicare/medicare-physician-pay-has-plummeted-2001-find-out-why>

2. Association of American Medical Colleges, "New AAMC report shows continuing projected physician shortage."
<https://www.aamc.org/news/press-releases/new-aamc-report-shows-continuing-projected-physician-shortage>

3. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Office of the Actuary, 2025 Medicare Trustees Report.
<https://www.cms.gov/oact/tr/2025>
