

## Ensuring Access to Specialty Care: Physician Payment Reform

**Key Takeaways:** *The Alliance urges Congress to repeal the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) and to cosponsor legislation that allows Medicare beneficiaries to freely contract with the physician of their choice.*

**Repeal the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB): Cosponsor S. 141.** The IPAB will require a board of non-elected government officials to recommend Medicare cuts when spending exceeds a targeted growth rate. These recommendations automatically go into effect unless blocked by a Congressional three-fifths supermajority. Although hospitals and long-term care facilities comprise over one-third of Medicare spending, they are exempted from IPAB cuts until 2020. This means that a disproportionate share of the burden will fall onto physicians, who make up only 12 percent of total Medicare expenditures.

The Alliance thanks the House of Representatives for passing H.R. 1190, the “Protecting Seniors’ Access to Medicare Act.” Introduced by Reps. Phil Roe, MD (R-TN) and Linda Sánchez (D-CA), this legislation fully repeals the IPAB. Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) has introduced the companion bill, S. 141, in the Senate.

**Support the Medicare Patient Empowerment Act: Cosponsor H.R. 1650 or Sponsor Senate companion bill.** The current structure of Medicare restricts the ability of seniors to see the physician of their choice by limiting beneficiary access to all physicians. One way patients can overcome this hurdle is to “privately contract” for services directly with their physicians. Unfortunately, under current law, beneficiaries who wish to privately contract with their physician must pay for the service entirely out of their own pocket, despite having paid into Medicare for many years. Furthermore, if a doctor has “opted out” of Medicare, in order to contract privately with even one patient, the physician is ineligible for Medicare reimbursement for two years.

The Alliance urges Representatives to cosponsor the “Medicare Patient Empowerment Act,” introduced by Rep. Tom Price, MD (R-GA), and encourages Senators to consider introducing companion legislation. The legislation removes the two-year Medicare ban for physicians who privately contract and allows patients who privately contract to recoup the amount Medicare would otherwise pay for the service.