

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and related organizations, I would like to express our ministry's concern for low-income and disabled Medicare beneficiaries as the Senate prepares legislation to prevent the scheduled decrease in payments to physicians. While many within these vulnerable populations are eligible for assistance with their Medicare premiums, enrollment barriers often keep them from taking advantage of the programs designed to help them and force them to make painful and difficult choices between urgent medical care and the other necessities of life.

Specifically, the Medicare Prescription Drug Extra Help Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) and Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) are not reaching many of the beneficiaries who need them most. Insufficient resources for outreach and enrollment efforts, difficult application forms and eligibility criteria which penalize some seniors for keeping retirement savings all have kept many low-income and disabled seniors from utilizing these programs.

Our Catholic health ministry is dedicated to ensuring that all persons, regardless of age, income or disability status, receive the health care they need. We have long supported programs such as Medicare to assist these persons with health coverage, and continue to support and urge any efforts to improve the Medicare program so that all seniors, particularly those most likely to fall through the cracks of the health care delivery system, will have equal access to Medicare services. While preventing the physician payment cuts is important, efforts to do so also could cause additional increases in Part B premiums and further erode access to care for vulnerable populations. Therefore, it is essential as you work to prevent the physician cuts that you also ensure that persons with incomes below \$15,000 per year are protected.

We urge you to ensure that the legislation simplifies Medicare low-income assistance programs; brings asset limits in line with the current cost of living; and improves outreach and participation for eligible populations, including special attention to eliminating cultural and language barriers. These efforts will help keep low-income Medicare beneficiaries healthy and independent, which will greatly improve the lives of these seniors and the persons who care for them.

If I can be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Michael Rodgers
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy