

Protect Senior Access to Essential Eye and Vision Care

Support Linking Medicare Pay to Inflationary Index, Needed Medicare Advantage Reforms

Summary

As physicians, doctors of optometry provide the overwhelming share of primary, medical, chronic, urgent and emergency eye health care America's traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage beneficiaries need—from comprehensive eye exams and vision correction treatment to laser surgical procedures and everything in between.

While doctors of optometry appreciate Congress enacting legislation to avert a planned 2026 pay cut, Congress can and must do more to address the growing access to essential eye care threat stemming from growing Medicare Advantage abuses as well as years of Medicare pay not keeping up with the cost of providing care.

That's why the AOA and other leading physician organizations are urging lawmakers to support linking Medicare pay for doctors of optometry and other physicians to the **Medicare Economic Index (H.R. 6160)** and **advance needed Medicare Advantage reforms aimed at holding plans accountable for limiting care and threatening access (H.R. 4559)**.

America's doctors of optometry are critical primary and medical eye care providers who have extensive, ongoing training to examine, diagnose, treat and manage ocular disorders, diseases and injuries. They also play an **important role in the management of systemic diseases with ocular manifestations including diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune diseases and neurologic disease.**

Normal, age-related changes in visual function and ocular structures and increases in the prevalence and incidence of ocular and systemic disease with age combine to make comprehensive eye and vision care services particularly important for older adults. Left untreated, a range of eye and vision conditions can lead to problems with taking medications, keeping track of personal information, walking, watching television, driving and reading, and often create social isolation. **Early detection and treatment of these conditions have been shown to translate into substantial economic savings and result in improved quality of life.**

Doctors of optometry provide more than two-thirds of all primary eye and vision health care in the U.S. as well as covered medical eye care physician services, including therapeutic laser eye care and management of patients with glaucoma and other chronic conditions, to nearly seven million Medicare beneficiaries each year.

Today, approximately 34,000 optometrists are enrolled as Medicare physicians serving patients in nearly 10,000 communities across the country—and in roughly half of those communities, local optometrists are the only eye doctors available.



Doctors of optometry are the only eye doctors available in **more than half of the 10,000** communities in which they practice.

While America's doctors of optometry appreciate action taken to blunt planned 2026 cuts, reimbursements continue falling behind the increasing costs of providing care. Unlike other Medicare providers (hospitals, hospice, ASCs), optometrists and other physicians are the only Medicare providers not seeing automatic,

annual inflationary updates. Congress must permanently tie Medicare physician pay to the Medicare Economic Index. Doctors of optometry are urging Congress to advance the **Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (H.R. 6160)**.



Adjusted for inflation, Medicare payments to physician have declined by **33%** from 2001-2025.

While pay rates under traditional Medicare desperately need to be addressed, Medicare Advantage (MA) is also in urgent need of reform. MA enrollment has rapidly increased in recent years, with 55% of all Medicare enrollees now covered by an MA plan.

As Medicare Advantage's market growth has continued to increase, MA plans are increasingly deploying schemes to maximize profits by squeezing providers. MA reimbursements for doctors of optometry and others have decreased while plans have deployed new systems to drastically delay payments.

As a result, hospitals, provider groups and even larger health systems are increasingly dropping out of MA contracts.

That's why the AOA and other physician organizations are backing the **Prompt and Fair Pay Act (H.R. 4559)**, which would require MA plans to reimburse doctors of optometry and other health care providers at least at the same rate as traditional Medicare and would help stop plans from needlessly delaying payments for needed care already provided to patients.

Frustration and disappointment related to supplemental benefits under Medicare Advantage is widespread.

Concerningly, while Medicare Advantage plans have proliferated and nearly all include a vision benefit, just 54.3% of beneficiaries were aware of having vision coverage.¹ AOA conducted a survey of doctors of optometry to gather insights on patients' experiences with Medicare Advantage plans. An overwhelming 96% of doctor of optometry respondents indicated they have had to address Medicare Advantage patients that are angry or unhappy with their coverage and benefits. Doctors of optometry indicated that patients are confused, patients have felt they were lied to, and it is not always explained to them that they may have copays. Of additional concern, 92% of respondents indicated that Medicare Advantage contracting and coverage challenges led to patients delaying needed medical eye care.

The Ask

Doctors of optometry urge U.S. House and Senate members to support automatic, annual inflationary updates for doctors of optometry and other physicians by permanently tying Medicare pay to the Medicare Economic Index (**H.R. 6160**) and back **H.R. 4559** to support vital Medicare Advantage pay and patient access reforms.



1. <https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/en/about/newsroom/press-releases/medicare-advantage-beneficiaries-did-not-receive-more-dental-vision-or-hearing-care>

Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act (H.R. 6160) Co-sponsors*

California Panetta (D), Bera (D)

Florida Bilirakis (R)

Washington Schrier (D)

Prompt and Fair Pay Act (H.R. 4559) Co-sponsors*

Alabama Sewell (D)

Maryland Harris (R)

North Carolina Murphy (R)

*As of 2/20/26

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