H.R. 539 / S. 106

Increase Access to Chiropractic Services to Decrease Costs in Medicare

The effect of increasing access to chiropractic services in Medicare is likely to be both real and substantial among Medicare beneficiaries age 65+, resulting in better care outcomes, fewer adverse events, and lower cost of care.

Greater availability of chiropractic care reduces costs for spine-related conditions:

- Access to chiropractic care in Medicare can reduce visits to primary care providers by 0.37 million visits, at **a savings of $83.5 million annually**.[9]
- Conversely, reduced access to chiropractic services increases visits to primary care physicians (32.3 visits per 1,000) **and the rate of spine surgeries** (5.5 additional surgeries per 1,000). This equates to an additional expense of $391 million to Medicare annually.[10]

Among Medicare beneficiaries:

- The risk of escalated care is **2.5 times greater** when care for back pain is initiated with opioid analgesic therapy versus spinal manipulative therapy (SMT). Escalated care includes hospitalizations, emergency department visits, advanced diagnostic imaging, specialist visits, back surgery, and interventional pain medicine techniques, all of which carry high risk of complications.[1]
- Adverse drug events are **42 times more likely** when opioid analgesics are chosen compared to SMT for firstline care of back pain. Among patients who received an opioid analgesic, 18.3% experienced an adverse drug event, compared to less than 1% who received spinal manipulation at any point during their care.[2]
- Long-term healthcare costs under Medicare are nearly **twice as high** for back pain patients who initiate care with opioid analgesics instead of SMT, including Part A, B, and D payments.[3]

Meanwhile, consider the benefits of patient access to chiropractic services:

- Those who use chiropractic spinal manipulation only to treat low back pain have **lower overall cost of care and shorter episodes of pain** compared to medical care alone (highest cost), or a combination of both. Users of chiropractic care also had **lower rates of spinal surgery**.[4]
- **Chiropractic use appears to be protective against functional decline** in activities of daily living and increase self-rated health, compared to usual medical care.[5]
- **Chiropractic treatment for spine care is safer**, compared to the risk associated with spine care delivered by primary care physicians.[6,7]
- 96.9 percent of 380 Medicare beneficiaries responding to an American Specialty Health patient satisfaction survey said that their **chiropractor was successful in treating their primary condition**.[8]
- 91 percent of the 380 Medicare beneficiaries responding to the ASH survey also **rated their chiropractic provider a 9 or 10 (the highest ratings available)**, compared with the ASH benchmark of 79% for providers receiving a 9 or 10 rating.[8]

For more about access to chiropractic for Medicare patients, visit MedicareModernization.org.

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H.R. 539 / S. 106

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