

## AMA CALLS ON CONGRESS TO STOP STALLING AND STABILIZE MEDICARE

Action needed now to protect Medicare, TRICARE patients and save taxpayers' money

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 23, 2012

WASHINGTON - Physicians today called on Congress to permanently stop a fiscally irresponsible cycle of scheduled cuts and short-term patches by eliminating the broken Medicare physician payment formula. The American Medical Association (AMA), the nation's largest physician organization, and state and specialty medical societies sent a letter (<http://www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/washington/medicare-sgr-sign-on-letter-23jan2012.pdf>) to the members of the congressional conference committee tasked with addressing this issue. The physicians call for an end to the failed payment formula that threatens access to care for seniors and military families in the Medicare and TRICARE programs. They ask Congress to use projected spending that will not be needed as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down to help pay for ensuring access to health care for military and seniors.

"There is bipartisan agreement that this issue has plagued Medicare and TRICARE for too long, and the cost for a permanent cure will never be less than it is right now," said AMA President Peter W. Carmel, M.D. "Using funds that will not be needed as the wars wind down to protect health care for men and women in uniform and our nation's seniors is the fiscally responsible thing to do. By eliminating this failed formula once and for all, Congress can stop growing the size of the problem for patients, physicians and taxpayers. With a 27 percent cut scheduled on March 1, the time for permanent action is now."

The cost to taxpayers for permanent repeal of the Medicare physician payment formula has grown dramatically over the years due to Congress' frequent short-term patches. As recently as 2005 the cost of permanent repeal would have been \$48 billion. Today it is estimated to be nearly \$300 billion. If Congress continues to implement the same temporary patches they have in the past, the cost will double again in only five years. "There have been 13 short-term patches passed by Congress. These patches increase both the long-term cost to taxpayers and the severity of scheduled cuts to physicians who care for Medicare and TRICARE patients," said Dr. Carmel. "Using funds that will not be needed as the wars wind down to eliminate the formula stops this cycle, protects access to care for patients and saves money for taxpayers."

Poll results show that an overwhelming number of Americans, 94 percent, believe a massive Medicare cut, like the one scheduled for March 1, is a serious problem for seniors. Congress' own Medicare advisory committee has said that one in four seniors seeking a new primary care physician in Medicare has had trouble finding one.

The AMA's Patients' Action Network offers an opportunity for patients to Contact their elected officials at [www.patientsactionnetwork.com](http://www.patientsactionnetwork.com) or by calling 888-434-6200. Physicians can reach out through the Physicians' Grassroots Network at [www.ama-assn.org/grassroots](http://www.ama-assn.org/grassroots) or by calling 800-833-6354.

"In the last six months, concerned Americans have sent more than 500,000 emails and phone calls through these networks to tell Congress to stop spending taxpayer dollars to preserve a formula everyone agrees is broken," said Dr. Carmel. "Congress can use projected funds that won't be spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to protect access to care for military and seniors without adding to the nation's deficit. Congress should not squander this opportunity to protect patients, physicians and taxpayers."

###

Media Contact:

Heather Lasher Todd  
AMA Media Relations  
202-789-7430  
[Heather.Lasher.Todd@ama-assn.org](mailto:Heather.Lasher.Todd@ama-assn.org)