

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus, and Representatives Roy Blunt (MO-7) and Mike Ross (AR-4) introduced the Medicare Access to Rehabilitation Act of 2009.

The bill permanently repeals monetary caps that limit Medicare beneficiaries' access to outpatient physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech-language pathology services.

"Everyday, Americans who suffer from debilitating diseases like Parkinson's or are recovering from serious injury need medical therapy in order to reach their highest functional level," Rep. Becerra said. "It is outrageous that in addition to focusing on their rehabilitation, they also have to worry about whether they will exceed Medicare's monetary caps. These arbitrary caps on physical, occupational and speech therapy are incompatible with the goal of recovering these patients' ability to function fully in their everyday lives."

"For more than a decade Congress has taken stop-gap measures to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries receive the therapy and services they need and their doctors prescribe," Blunt said. "It's time that we put aside the temporary patches we have passed for the last decade and work on a permanent fix that eliminates arbitrary caps limiting the quality of care patients receive."

"Congress has a responsibility to pass a permanent solution for therapy caps to ensure our nation's consumers continue to receive much-needed treatments," said Ross. "I am proud to join with my colleagues as an original cosponsor of this important legislation to provide long-term relief to patients and health care providers, and I will continue to advocate for its passage in the House of Representatives."

A March 2008 Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) study provided evidence that enforcement of the monetary caps could cause Medicare beneficiaries harm as it may require them to delay necessary medical care, force others to assume higher out-of-pocket costs, and disrupt the continuum of care for many seniors and individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the study provided data that the sickest patients who suffered from Parkinson's disease or who have multiple medical problems were most likely to exceed the monetary caps.

Since inclusion of the caps in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, both Democratic and Republican Congresses and Administrations have interceded to prevent their implementation and enforcement citing the negative impact the caps would have on elderly patients' access to necessary services. Most recently, Congress extended through 2009 the existing medical exceptions process that gives the Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to allow patients to exceed the monetary caps if deemed medically necessary.

"I urge my colleagues to continue ensuring that Americans have access to the highest quality physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language pathology services by supporting this legislation," Rep. Becerra said.

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