



**AMA ONLINE SURVEY OF PHYSICIANS**  
**The Impact of Medicare Physician Payment on Seniors Access' To Care**  
**May 2010**

*Key Findings from a new AMA online survey of 9,000+ physicians who care for Medicare patients.*

**About one in five physicians overall (17%)** are currently restricting the number of Medicare patients in their practice. The top two reasons they gave\*:

- Medicare payment rates are too low (85%)
- ongoing threat of future payment cuts makes Medicare an unreliable payer (78%)

Looking at just primary care physicians\*\*, **nearly one-third (31 percent)** currently restrict the number of Medicare patients in their practice. The top two reasons they gave:

- Medicare payment rates are too low (83%)
- ongoing threat of future payment cuts makes Medicare an unreliable payer (82%)

In response to this year's two short-term delays to the 21% Medicare physician payment cut, **nearly two-thirds (60%)** of physicians looked into opting out of Medicare and treating patients through the private contracting option. Other actions included:

- Delayed payments for supplies, rent and/or other expenses (39%)
- Took out a loan or line of credit in order to continue paying bills (17%)
- Held up paychecks or laid off/furloughed staff (17%)
- Cancelled or postponed scheduled services to Medicare patients (14%)
- Temporarily closed practice to new appointments with Medicare patients (13%)

Asked about temporary proposals under consideration by Congress, physicians say that the short-term actions will impact patients' access to care.

If Congress enacts a 4-7 month Medicare payment freeze with a 21% payment cut, physicians say they will:

- Restrict the number of Medicare patients they treat (54%)
- Stop taking new Medicare patients (50%)
- Stop taking any Medicare patients (31%)

If Congress enacts a 3-5 year increase in Medicare payments with a 21% payment cut to physicians in the future, physicians say they will:

- Restrict the number of Medicare patients they treat (48%)
- Stop taking new Medicare patients (42%)
- Stop taking any Medicare patients (26%)

*\*Physicians in this survey were asked to check all answers that apply.*

*\*\*Primary care is defined as Family Practice, General Practice, Internal Medicine, and Obstetrics/Gynecology.*