

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 29, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma:

We write to bring to your attention the alarming effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on physicians who provide testing for low bone density and osteoporosis in older populations. While insufficient Medicare reimbursement hampered access to dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) testing prior to the pandemic, physicians' ability to continue offering DXA testing for low bone density may all but disappear as a result of the pandemic absent urgent action from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Osteoporosis and its related bone fractures have a staggering impact on the United States health care system, accounting for approximately 300,000 hip fracture hospitalizations, with costs projected to grow to over \$25 billion by 2025. Because the risk of osteoporosis increases as bones become thinner with age, approximately 44 percent of all women and 25 percent of men over the age of 60 will experience a bone break due to osteoporosis in their lifetime. These high rates of osteoporosis and low bone mass result in over two million related fractures each year in the United States. One in three people who experience a bone fracture due to osteoporosis will spend a year or more in a nursing home.

Over the last decade, Medicare reimbursement for DXA tests performed in the physician office setting has declined from \$140 in 2006 to only \$40.06 in 2020 (CPT code 77080). The 2021 proposed Physician Fee Schedule rule has proposed yet another eight percent cut to DXA, bringing the reimbursement rate to \$36.78. According to a recent study from the Journal of the American College of Radiology, from 2007 to 2019, DXA reimbursement rate fell by a mean change of 70.5 percent, the largest decrease of any imaging test. Today, because of misaligned payment policy, fewer than 12 percent of all eligible women on Medicare receive bone density testing.

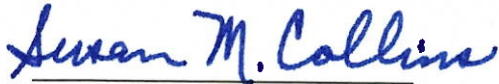
The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to eliminate what patient access to DXA still remains in the physician office setting. With providers across the country facing tremendous financial challenges as result of the ongoing crisis, 20 percent of physicians recently surveyed who currently offer DXA testing say that they will discontinue this service because of low reimbursement from Medicare. This prospect is an unacceptable failure to patients seeking preventive care and treatment before osteoporosis advances.

For the health of Medicare beneficiaries, we urge CMS to address DXA reimbursement in the final 2021 Physician Fee Schedule rule. Further, we strongly encourage CMS to engage in meaningful dialogue with Congress and the stakeholder community to look for ways to ensure

appropriate access to a test that can help extend and improve the lives of Medicare beneficiaries while enhancing the value of the program's benefits.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Shelley Moore Capito  
Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema  
Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

/s/ Marsha Blackburn  
Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Martha McSally  
Martha McSally  
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Tester  
Jon Tester  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator