

Challenges for Occupational Therapy

Notes to Hill Day Participants:

Your meeting with a Senator/Rep or staff should include a brief introduction to occupational therapy that will help emphasize and the importance of the profession and the need for policy changes. You should start the discussion by making sure the Rep/Senator or staffer knows what occupational therapy is and why it is important.

Then, following the discussion points below, you should discuss that occupational therapy services have faced particularly tough payment cuts over the last few years. You don't have to be an expert on the history of the cuts – you are simply providing a high-level overview and providing them with general details. This introductory discussion will help set the stage for your specific asks for support of the EMPOWER Act and the Expanded Telehealth Access Act. If they want to know more about what they can do to support payments for occupational therapy under Medicare, we have included a larger “policy principles” document in the package that you can show them. You do not need to know those policy principles, just share that they have been included.

Discussion Points for Your Meeting

- Start with an introduction to occupational therapy and why access to services is important. Then lead into the current challenges.
- Occupational therapy practitioners have been particularly hard hit by cuts to Medicare payments since 2021.
- If no further action is taken, OT services will have received a phased in cut of at least 9% between 2021 and 2025 because of Medicare budget neutrality policies.
- Budget neutrality means that any increase in payment for one set of healthcare practitioners triggers a cut to other practitioners. Therapy providers have been particularly hard hit by these changes because we cannot bill any of the codes that have received large recent increases.
- Additionally, payment to occupational therapy assistants, who provide 38% of all Medicare Part B OT services, was cut by 15% starting in 2022.
- These cuts, in addition to payment changes from 2010 to 2020 have significantly eroded payment for critical occupational therapy services.
- As Congress considers Medicare reform – we urge you to adopt policies that will help preserve access to occupational therapy services under Medicare and reverse current policy trends which have reduced payment with no regard to the actual services being provided (there is a handout that outlines some of the policy principles).
- There are two bills that would help remove current barriers to occupational therapy services that we would like to discuss with you now.