



Nearly One Million Seniors and People with Disabilities Will Not Get Home Health Care This Year. With Payment Cuts, It's About to Get Much Worse



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More than six million seniors and people with disabilities use home health services each year. Nearly one million are expected to be turned away from these services because of workforce shortages in 2022—that's more than a 300% increase from 2019.[1] In fact, entire communities across the country are now becoming "home health deserts"—areas where virtually no home health care is available. These are communities already starved of health services—usually Black, Brown, and rural communities, where health disparities continue to rise.

Home health is critical to the health care ecosystem. Effective home health care helps prevent infections, falls, adverse medication reactions, malnutrition, and countless other conditions. Patients who receive home health care are less likely to end up back in the hospital or in a nursing home. Struggling with limited capacity and longer stays, hospitals are referring more and more patients (and sicker patients) to home health to ensure safe discharge and recovery. But amidst a chronic worker shortage, home health agencies are laboring to recruit and retain the nurses and other staff we need to meet demand.

The result is clogged emergency departments, admission delays for patients who need hospital care, and more patients ending up back in the hospital because they didn't get the home health care they needed to heal properly.

It's a growing crisis, and it's about to get much worse. Despite strong opposition from patients, providers and members of Congress, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is imposing home health rate cuts of nearly 8%. Half of those cuts start next year, with the other half delayed to a future year, where they will be added on to other significant payment reductions.

The cuts will make it even harder for agencies to recruit and retain nurses and other home health workers, and that will mean even more people going without needed care, particularly in underserved communities.

CMS says it's only following the rules that Congress set out when it changed the home health payment policies several years ago. Clearly massive Medicare cuts when home health agencies are hemorrhaging workers is not what Congress had in mind. Indeed, the Biden Administration and Congress have been working to address the home care workforce crisis. The American Rescue Plan [invested nearly \\$13B](#) in short-term funding to strengthen home and community-based Medicaid services. Proposals like the Better Care Better Jobs Act would invest even more over a longer period.

At a minimum, Congress needs to **pass the Preserving Access to Home Health Act ([H.R.8581/S.4605](#)) by the end of 2022**. The bill would defer cuts until 2026, providing time for Congress, CMS, and home health stakeholders to come up with a reimbursement approach that ensures home health care is available for the growing number of senior citizens, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups who need this essential care.

[1] Based on analysis by Home Care HomeBase in public comment on *(CMS-1766-P – CY 2023 Home Health Prospective Payment System Rate Update*. Page 6, Figure 1: % Non-Admits due to Staffing Shortage and subsequent discussion with HCHB staff.

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