

America's Hospitals and Health Systems

October 20, 2015

Dear Congressional Leaders:

On behalf of our organizations and the millions of patients they serve, the leaders of more than 400 hospitals and health systems across the country write in strong support of the Establishing Beneficiary Equity in the Hospital Readmission Program Act (S.688/H.R.1343).

This legislation would ensure hospitals caring for vulnerable patients are not disproportionately and unfairly penalized by the Medicare Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program (HRRP). These hospitals strive to provide high-quality care to all. But even with this commitment and their success caring for those in need and improving patient outcomes, many socioeconomic factors pose obstacles to sustained patient health. As a result, some patients return to our hospitals despite the high quality of care they received.

There is a robust and growing body of academic literature demonstrating the impact of socioeconomic factors on a person's health. The findings of a September 2015 article in *JAMA Internal Medicine* "support legislation calling for the adjustment of readmission rates and other quality measures for patients' socioeconomic status and more health-related variables" because, currently, "Medicare is penalizing hospitals to a large extent based on the patients they serve."¹

The Establishing Beneficiary Equity in the Hospital Readmission Program Act would ensure the HRRP does not disproportionately penalize hospitals that provide a high volume of care to individuals who face socioeconomic challenges—a lack of housing, behavioral health issues, limited English proficiency, and others. Most important, it would ensure that the millions of patients who rely on our hospitals have access to care in their communities.

We urge Congress to pass the Establishing Beneficiary Equity in the Hospital Readmission Program Act. Hospitals work diligently to reduce readmissions and improve patient safety, and rely on you to ensure that HRRP treats all hospitals—and all patients—fairly.

Sincerely,

The following 103 hospital leaders:

¹ Barnett ML, Hsu J, McWilliams JM. Patient Characteristics and Differences in Hospital Readmission Rates. *JAMA Intern Med*. Published online September 14, 2015. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2015.4660.

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