

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 6, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Administrator Verma:

We write to bring your attention to the need to adapt Medicare coverage rules during the coronavirus, or “COVID-19” outbreak, so that Medicare patients with diabetes can get access to the services and supports that they need to properly manage their diabetes. As you know, this health crisis poses an unprecedented and disproportionate risk to the diabetes community, who are at increased risk of being impacted by COVID-19. We urge you to ensure that individuals with diabetes are able to access vital services such as Diabetes Self-Management Training (DSMT).

Since 2003, Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes have been able to access DSMT courses that help educate individuals on how to manage their diabetes. Training provided through DSMT includes education on healthy eating and lifestyle, monitoring blood sugar, insulin preparation, adherence to drug regimens and steps for reducing risks for adverse medical events. Improved management of diabetes, including better control of hemoglobin A1c levels can help ensure better health outcomes for people with diabetes and reduce their risk for hospitalization. Given the potential for exposure to COVID-19 during a hospital stay and the unique risks that COVID-19 poses to Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes, it is absolutely critical to leverage DSMT as a part of a multi-pronged effort to reduce hospitalization risks for people with diabetes.

We appreciate that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services (CMS) has modified existing Medicare payment and coverage rules to allow for health care providers to offer DSMT services to Medicare beneficiaries through telehealth. We applaud CMS’s efforts to expand access to DSMT during this critical time, including programs provided one-on-one to Medicare beneficiaries via telehealth, as well as programs provided via the phone. These audio-only methods are critical for beneficiaries who do not have access to internet or other technologies that allow for visual-included interactions.

During this crisis, we also need to ensure that individuals with diabetes can access DSMT services through the broadest possible range of qualified health care providers. CMS continues to expand the definition of eligible professionals providing telehealth services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. As DSMT programs bill as an entity rather than at the individual provider level, we ask CMS to confirm that DSMT programs, eligible to bill Medicare Part B, are considered distant site practitioners approved to furnish telehealth services.

Finally, it is critical that we make certain that Medicare beneficiaries do not have their progress on diabetes management interrupted due to Medicare coverage rules that limit the number of hours of DSMT education that they can receive in a given year. Under current rules, Medicare provides coverage for one hour of initial individualized training followed by up to nine hours of group training during an individual's first year of DSMT education. These ten total hours of training cannot be "rolled over" beyond the 12-month period after which the individual receives his or her first training session. However, during each subsequent 12-month period, the individual is eligible for up to two hours of follow-up training. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, we strongly encourage CMS to waive the requirement that the initial ten hours of DSMT be furnished within the 12-month period, and instead allow for Medicare beneficiaries to "roll over" unused DSMT hours beyond the 12-month cut-off period.

Together we must work to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries who have diabetes continue to have access to services that are vital to management of their conditions without having to risk exposure to COVID-19. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

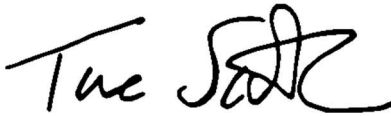
Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator