

# SAFE Act Reintroduced to Prioritize Physical Therapy-Based Falls Prevention for Older Americans



Bipartisan legislation aims to boost falls screening and prevention services among Medicare beneficiaries.

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**Alexandria, Va. —** The American Physical Therapy Association applauds new legislation that would expand access to physical therapist falls prevention-related services in Medicare's "welcome" visit and annual wellness checks. Reintroduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Carol Miller, R-W.Va., and Melanie Stansbury, D-N.M., as the Stopping Addiction and Falls for the Elderly Act, or SAFE Act, this bipartisan legislation calls for more robust falls screening and prevention services, including those conducted by physical therapists (and occupational therapists), as a regular part of Medicare's Initial Preventive Physical Examination, and the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit.

"The American Physical Therapy Association applauds Rep. Miller's and Rep. Stansbury's leadership on this important bipartisan legislation that addresses falls and falls prevention for Medicare beneficiaries," said APTA President Kyle Covington, PT, DPT, PhD. "APTA's report titled 'The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the U.S.' shows the cost-effectiveness of physical therapist services for falls prevention and emphasizes the need for improved access to them. By reducing the risk of falls, this legislation will improve patients' lives and provide cost-savings to the Medicare program."

"Seniors should have sufficient resources available to protect themselves as they age," said Rep. Miller. "The SAFE Act would provide physical and occupational therapists the ability to complete falls risks assessments for seniors as part of their Medicare Annual Wellness benefit. With this additional data, there will be more accountability and transparency on how we can protect those who are at risk of falling. It's no secret the U.S. population is aging, and it's important to have enough information as seniors receive treatment for injuries related to a fall so the health care system can best care for them."

The SAFE Act would ensure that beneficiaries identified by their physicians as having experienced a fall in the year before they received their Medicare Initial Preventive Physical Examination would be referred to a physical therapist for screening and falls prevention services. In addition, beneficiaries who've been enrolled in Medicare for at least a year and who choose to participate in an annual wellness visit would be referred for a separate falls risk and assessment and potential additional PT services if the Annual Wellness Visit reveals that they've fallen within the previous year. In addition to addressing and reducing falls among older adults, this legislation is also poised to decrease opioid use that often occurs after a fall injury.

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 3 million older adults are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries annually. Although the estimated prevalence of nonfatal and

fatal falls increases with age, falls are not an inevitable part of aging. Older adult falls cost \$50 billion in medical costs annually, with 75% paid by Medicare and Medicaid. These falls can be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors through effective preventive strategies.

As identified in APTA's report "[The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States](#)," seeing a PT for falls prevention services was associated with a net cost benefit of approximately \$2,100 per episode of care, primarily from avoiding related hospital admissions and emergency department visits.

The SAFE Act aligns with APTA's ongoing [public policy priorities](#) of expanding health benefits under federal programs such as Medicare to include coverage for preventive and wellness services provided by physical therapists to help reduce downstream costs.

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The American Physical Therapy Association represents more than 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and physical therapy students nationwide. Visit [apta.org](http://apta.org) to learn more.