

# Physical Therapy-Based Falls Prevention Identified as Top Priority in New Legislation



Bipartisan legislation would 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. Introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Carol Miller, R-W.Va., and Melany Stansbury, D-N.M., as the Stopping Addiction and Falls for the Elderly Act, or SAFE Act (H.R. 7618), this bipartisan legislation calls for more robust falls screening and prevention services, including those conducted by PTs, as a regular part of Medicare's Initial Preventive Physical Examination, and the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit.

"The American Physical Therapy Association applauds the leadership of Representatives Miller and Stansbury on this important legislation that will improve the lives of Medicare beneficiaries and provide cost savings," said APTA President Roger Herr, PT, MPA. "The SAFE Act legislation is consistent with findings from APTA's recent report 'The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the U.S.,' which identifies the cost-effectiveness of physical therapist services for falls prevention and emphasizes the need for improved access to them."

"Seniors should have ample resources available to protect themselves as they age," said Congresswoman Carol Miller. "The SAFE Act would allow physical and occupational therapists to complete falls risk assessments for seniors as part of their Medicare Annual Wellness benefit. In doing so, this assessment will provide 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."

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 3 million older adults are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries, and 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 by way of the hospital admissions and emergency department visits that could be avoided.

The SAFE Act would ensure that beneficiaries identified by their physicians as having experienced a fall in the year prior to their Initial Preventive Physical Examination would be referred to a physical therapist for screening and falls preventive 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.

This 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.