

Protecting Florida's Seniors: Fighting Fraud and Financial Exploitation
Testimony from Brandy Bauer, Director, Senior Medicare Patrol Resource Center

Chairman Scott,

Thank you for inviting me here today on behalf of the Senior Medicare Patrol program.

The nation's 54 Senior Medicare Patrol, or SMP, programs are managed by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, with the mission to help empower and assist people to prevent, detect, and report Medicare fraud, errors, and abuse.

Medicare fraud is a particularly insidious form of financial scam, because unlike other fraud schemes targeting an individual, the government and American taxpayers all pay the price. It's also challenging to detect Medicare fraud in real time, as there can be weeks or months between when Medicare is falsely billed for services and when an enrollee sees that charge show up on their Medicare Summary Notice or plan's Explanation of Benefits.

The Senior Medicare Patrol program model is one of prevention. SMPs educate millions of Medicare beneficiaries each year on how to guard their personal health information, scrutinize their medical statements and bills, and subsequently alert the program to any suspicious activity. The SMPs report cases of possible fraud, errors, and abuse to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and HHS Office of Inspector General, who then take up the investigation.

Here's just one real-life example of how this work plays out: Recently, a gentleman from Walton County, Florida was looking at his Medicare Summary Notice

and discovered charges for urinary catheters and glucose monitoring supplies – equipment that he neither needs nor ever received. He reported this to the Florida Senior Medicare Patrol, who were able to help him get a new, uncompromised Medicare number. Yet Medicare had already paid over \$15,000 for these fraudulent charges.

This beneficiary was observant; think how many times this scenario takes place across Florida and the country and goes undetected. As such, it's hard to get a concrete calculation of how much Medicare fraud costs Americans each year, but estimates put it in the tens of billions of dollars.

Because the Senior Medicare Patrol relies heavily on trusted volunteers from the community – in many cases, older adults themselves – the SMP program is often on the forefront of detecting emerging fraud trends. SMPs were among the first groups to spot unusual activity around fraudsters offering COVID-19 test kits in exchange for personal or medical information. Other emerging schemes the SMPs have helped identify include genetic testing scams, hospice fraud, and most recently, schemes related to remote patient monitoring and wound care. In addition to costing Medicare billions of dollars, some of these schemes can cause real patient harm, such as when a person falsely enrolled in hospice may be denied coverage for services that fall outside of palliative care.

The Senior Medicare Patrol is an Older Americans Act success story. First authorized under the OAA in 1997, the SMPs have provided outreach, counseling, and education about Medicare fraud to millions of older Americans. Since their creation, expected recoveries to Medicare (and Medicaid) attributable to the SMPs equals more than \$287 million.

Medicare fraud doesn't exist in a vacuum. People vulnerable to other forms of financial exploitation may be at risk of unknowingly sharing their medical identity with health insurance fraudsters. Many of the same prevention strategies we hear from other sectors are relevant here as well – such as encouraging people with Medicare to guard their medical identity just as they would their Social Security or banking information, hang up on unsolicited calls, and report suspicious activity to the authorities.

The Senior Medicare Patrol's efforts not only serve to enhance the financial, physical, and mental well-being of older adults, but also to preserve the integrity of Medicare. I'd like to thank the Chairman and Senate Aging Committee for including our program in this important conversation today.