



The ACO Assignment Improvement Act *Senators Whitehouse (D-RI) & Barrasso (R-WY)*

What does the ACO Assignment Improvement Act do?

This legislation will both improve patients' access to care, especially in rural and underserved America, and reduce inequities by removing the statutory requirement that patients have at least one primary care visit with a physician during the year in order to be assigned to an Accountable Care Organization (ACO). Removing this requirement will allow nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and other non-providers to contribute toward ACO assignments and move patients into receiving better-coordinated and more affordable care provided by ACOs.

Background

Currently, Medicare beneficiaries are assigned to an ACO based on a visit with a primary care physician – excluding the many beneficiaries who receive primary care from non-physician providers. We know that many people in rural communities do not always have access to an MD primary care provider but have formed long-standing relationships with advanced practice providers. The ACO Assignment Improvement Act addresses this inequity by allowing assignments based on primary care visits with nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and clinical nurse specialists.

ACOs are groups of hospitals, doctors, and other health care providers who voluntarily join together to coordinate care for a specific patient population. When an ACO delivers high-quality care at a lower cost than traditional fee-for-service spending, the ACO shares those savings with Medicare. [According to CMS](#), ACOs have been highly effective saving Medicare approximately \$1.8 billion in 2022, the sixth consecutive year of net savings.

Removing the physician barrier will also encourage ACO formation by helping health care providers attain enough ACO beneficiaries to participate in the Medicare Shared Savings Program. Through these changes, ACO assignments will be more effective for beneficiaries and providers in rural communities that suffer from acute physician shortage.