

Medicare wants to increase payments for heart rehab. Hospitals see an opening to get more



By [Bob Herman](#) Sept. 18, 2023

Medicare plans to pay more for a type of cardiac rehabilitation that takes place in certain outpatient clinics owned by hospitals.

Medicare has admitted it is doing so due to an error in reading federal law, but it also goes against the grain of the current environment, where support for [site-neutral payments](#) has never been higher. Some members of Congress and health care experts are [pushing for a system](#) that would not pay hospital outpatient departments more for identical services that are provided in lower-priced physician offices.

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Naturally, hospitals cheered regulators for increasing payments. But they don't want the government to stop there. They also want Medicare to retroactively reprocess all underpaid heart rehab sessions, and they are using this proposal as a way to reiterate their desire to kill all policies that would pay hospital-owned clinics the same as physician offices.

The service at issue is called intensive cardiac rehab, or ICR. People who suffered heart attacks or have undergone serious heart surgeries are eligible for this type of rehab, which encompasses both rigorous exercise and learning sessions, like how to cook heart-healthy meals. The goal is to lower the risk of patients' future heart problems, and Medicare has approved three different [ICR programs](#).