

## **Trump allies say Oz ignored their pleas to reverse a Medicare pay cut. Doctors are split on the issue.**

As two doctors groups wage a turf war, five Republican lawmakers have urged the Trump administration to roll back a Medicare pay cut for skin cancer treatment.

Donald Trump's allies in Congress are frustrated with Mehmet Oz, head of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, for cutting federal funding for an effective skin cancer treatment that's popular among older Americans. Some doctors want them to drop the issue.

Four Republican lawmakers [sent a letter to the Trump administration in November urging the delay](#) of a roughly 75 percent Medicare pay cut for doctors providing a treatment for less serious forms of skin cancer that combines ultrasound imaging and radiation therapy as an alternative to surgery.

The pleas from the GOP lawmakers — Sens. [Eric Schmitt](#) (Mo.) and [Roger Marshall](#) (Kan.) and Reps. [Ronny Jackson](#) (Texas) and [Brian Jack](#) (Ga.) — went unanswered, and the policy was implemented at the start of 2026.

“Preserving access to this lower-cost, office-based treatment option will help advance President Trump's goals of empowering patients, supporting independent medical practices, and improve healthcare quality and affordability for America's seniors,” the lawmakers [wrote in a follow-up letter sent last week](#) to Oz and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The signees included an additional Republican, Rep. [Carol Miller](#) of West Virginia.

The five lawmakers urged the Trump administration to consider adjusting reimbursement and “appropriately recognize the resources required to furnish these services.”

**Why it matters:** Broadly, doctors have long pushed for higher Medicare pay, but not all providers are backing the GOP lawmakers' request for higher reimbursement for the in-office skin cancer treatment. The split highlights an ongoing battle between two groups of doctors fighting to protect their own specialties: dermatology practices offering the therapy and radiation oncologists.

Both groups want more Medicare money and more patients to come to them for skin cancer treatment. With limited Medicare dollars to go around, a cut for one specialty may mean more money for the other.

The dermatologists have won the support of the five GOP lawmakers, who say they want to allow their largely rural constituencies who live far from cancer centers to be able to get skin cancer treatment at dermatology offices — not just hospitals.

But CMS and the American Medical Association, the nation's largest professional group for doctors, are on the side of the radiation oncologists who say using ultrasound imaging with radiation therapy for skin cancer treatment is unnecessary and that some dermatology practices overuse it.

**Background:** The CMS reimbursement change followed an overhaul to the radiation therapy billing structure by the AMA, which CMS relies on to define Medicare reimbursements. After the American Society for Radiation Oncology argued that allowing dermatologists to bill separately for image guidance using ultrasounds [was leading to overuse and excessive Medicare spending](#), the AMA — and subsequently CMS — stopped allowing doctors to bill separately for the image guidance and bundled their pay for the procedure.

It amounted to a roughly 75 percent pay cut, according to the GOP lawmakers.

“The cuts to superficial image-guided radiotherapy were extremely appropriate,” said Christopher Jahraus, a radiation oncologist in Alabama, adding that dermatologists had been “inappropriately” using radiation oncology codes to treat skin cancer, leading to a “ridiculous amount of overspend by the government.”

Medicare spends roughly \$20 million a year on the image-guided therapy, according to an American Society for Radiation Oncology analysis, but dermatology groups have noted it’s a fraction of what the program spends on other more invasive treatments, like Mohs surgery, at more than \$500 million a year.

Jahraus said rural Medicare patients would be better served at radiotherapy centers that treat all types of cancer, by doctors trained in radiation oncology who are better suited to coordinate care for cancer patients — but added that increasing access to those centers in rural areas would only be possible with a higher Medicare pay rate for the oncologists.

Jahraus also applauded a CMS policy change requiring further training for providers of the superficial radiation therapy.

**The other side:** Kerwin Brandt, CEO of SkinCure Oncology, says dermatologists don’t need extra training to provide the therapy, noting the high satisfaction rate of the more than 140,000 patients who have received the treatment at a dermatology practice.

He added that many rural patients don’t have easy access to cancer centers in their areas. Removing access to the radiotherapy at dermatology offices further limits rural

seniors' care options, forcing them to go to urban centers or to undergo Mohs surgery, where surgeons remove the skin cancer tumor layer by layer.

"We have the ability to take this technology right into the rural community, and these patients are treated right in their own hometowns, in their local dermatology office," he said. "It's a tremendous benefit for patients, and it's a tremendous benefit for access to care."

That perspective was ignored during a meeting this spring between Alec Aramanda, principal deputy director for the Center for Medicare, and the GOP lawmakers' staff, according to Brandt, who was at the meeting, and another person involved in the discussions, granted anonymity to speak freely.

Lawmakers, including Marshall, an OB/GYN, and Jackson, an emergency medicine doctor, explained that the policy change could reduce access to curative skin cancer treatment for seniors in rural America — a core component of the Republican base — and force providers of the treatment out of business.

"It was a one-way street," said Brandt, whose Illinois-based company specializes in image-guided radiation therapy offered at more than 300 centers across the country. "We communicated the facts, we delivered facts, but yet none of the facts appeared in the policy decisions."

The meeting ticked off the lawmakers, the person familiar with the conversations added. "They're like, 'What in the world, we've got tons of seniors back home, this is such a game-changer treatment that they were able to get through Medicare,'" the person said. "Well, they can't do it anymore, it can only be out of pocket."

Marshall's office declined to comment. The four other lawmakers who signed the July letter did not respond to requests for comment.

CMS told POLITICO the agency finalized the image-guided superficial radiation therapy rates "following a review of the available information and the public comments received through the rulemaking process."

"The agency's payment decisions are guided by applicable law, clinical and coding considerations, and the goal of ensuring that Medicare payments are accurate and appropriately reflect the services furnished to beneficiaries," a CMS spokesperson said in a statement.

**What's next:** SkinCure Oncology sued CMS in March over the policy change. The provider group argues the agency ignored clinical guidance — including peer-reviewed studies showing the efficacy of the treatment — and that the policy will limit patient access to a medically necessary procedure. CMS [has said those studies](#) are "at high risk of bias" because of the authors' ties to industry.

In April, a federal judge denied SkinCure Oncology's request to pause the new mandate. The CMS spokesperson said the agency does not comment on matters in pending litigation.

The reimbursement change has had a ripple effect on seniors and providers — mostly specialized dermatology practices, according to Brandt and the five GOP lawmakers.

Since the policy took effect at the beginning of this year, Brandt said more than 160 of the dermatology practices SkinCure Oncology partners with nationwide have stopped offering the image-guided treatment option. The company still has contracts with more than 300 offices offering the therapy.