

House Ways & Means Advances Medically Tailored Meal Pilot In Medicare

Sep 16, 2026, 7:54 PM EDT

(Inside Health Policy)

The House Ways & Means Committee unanimously (39-0) advanced bipartisan legislation creating a six-year Medicare pilot program allowing hospitals to partner with entities to deliver medically tailored meals (MTM) to certain patients after discharge.

"This bill promotes the Trump administration's Make America Healthy Again agenda by creating access to healthy, medically necessary, home-delivered meals for Medicare seniors recovering from a hospital stay, improving health outcomes and saving taxpayer money," Ways & Means Committee Chair Jason Smith (R-MO) said during a Wednesday (Sept. 16) markup of the bill.

The MTM Pilot is a priority of the Food is Medicine Coalition, which celebrated the committee's vote as a major milestone.

"Reaching this stage reflects years of education, advocacy and bipartisan collaboration by Food is Medicine Coalition members, community partners, healthcare leaders and advocates across the country," FIMC said in a statement.

In a January letter to Congressional leaders, the coalition said the MTM pilot can not only improve health outcomes for seniors but could save funding as well. A recent model showed if all eligible beneficiaries received MTM interventions, the country could save more than \$23 billion in health costs, and about 2.6 million hospitalizations would be averted, FIMC noted.

House Rules Committee ranking Democrat Jim McGovern (MA) and Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) co-sponsored the bill last September along with Reps. Chllie Pingree (D-ME), Dwight Evans (D-PA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Roger Marshall (R-KS), Tina Smith (D-MN) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA) sponsored sister legislation.

As the House sponsors explain in a release, the bill establishes the six-year nationwide pilot providing MTM to Medicare beneficiaries with diet-related diseases like heart disease, diabetes or COPD. Forty hospitals can participate, and those in rural and underserved areas will be prioritized. Chosen hospitals must partner with an organization to deliver two meals a day for at least 12 weeks.

While the legislation says the program will prioritize rural and underserved areas, committee staff clarified that any hospital or critical access hospital can apply. Eligible hospitals must have at least a three-star rating over the previous two years. Staff also clarified that the program is available to patients who have been admitted and discharged from a hospital and live at home, even if they first go to a rehabilitation or skilled nursing facility. Patients with both Medicare and Medicaid are eligible for the program.

HHS will determine the form, manner and amount of payment for the selected hospitals and patients cannot be charged any cost-sharing fees. The bill is budget neutral, and costs associated with the program are offset by reduced reimbursements, according to the text. -- Amy

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