

## 179 House Members Tell CMS To Drop Mandatory Pilots

CMS is being pressured by 179 House lawmakers, nearly all Republicans, to drop mandatory demonstrations, including the controversial proposed Part B Drug Payment Model, and to keep pilots small. The lawmakers and many provider organizations say CMS is using the demonstration projects as a back-door to setting national health care policy, instead of using them to test policies.

The Affordable Care Act gives CMS the power to test policies with demonstration projects, and if these lower prices and maintain quality, or improve quality without increasing spending, the agency may turn the pilots into national programs. CMS has been criticized for abusing this power from time to time by starting demonstrations that cover large areas and that require participation. Some Democrats say they fear how a Republican administration would use the CMS Innovation Center, but Democrats have been less outspoken than Republicans.

Until November of last year, CMS tested policies with small, voluntary demonstrations. The Comprehensive Care for Joint Replacement model is the first mandatory demo. It encompasses more than 800 hospitals in 67 geographic areas. The agency this summer also proposed a mandatory demonstration to bundle payment for heart surgeries.

Some providers and lawmakers criticized the Agency for those models, but Agency officials hit the strongest resistance to the mandatory demonstration it proposed to slow the rise of drug prices. The agency is expected to follow through with the demonstration, albeit with at least some of the changes that Democrats seek.

“The proposed Part B Drug Payment Model is a clear example of the CMMI’s overstep of authority, given the mandatory participation required of thousands of providers and millions of patients with chronic conditions and rare diseases on a near-nationwide scale,” the House letter states, referring to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation that runs the projects. The Republican lawmakers say the mandatory demonstrations focus on saving money without regard to the impact on the quality of care.

Former Obama administration officials have urged CMS to initiate more mandatory bundled payment demonstrations before President Obama leaves office. They said additional mandatory bundles would signal to stakeholders that Medicare plans to aggressively use bundled payment policy.