

Open Letter to Senator Mark Warner:

Allow Medicare to Negotiate Lower Drug Prices and Expand Medicare in Budget Reconciliation Bill

September 30, 2021

Dear Senator Warner:

You have a tremendous opportunity to deliver for America's seniors, people with disabilities and people approaching retirement. The undersigned Virginia-based organizations representing diverse interests, including consumer safety, public health, faith-based, racial justice and labor organizations, are calling on you to ensure that critical improvements and expansion of Medicare are included in the final budget reconciliation package, so that Congress and the Biden administration will deliver on key promises and improve the lives of millions. Specifically, Virginians urge you to include robust Medicare drug price negotiation to lower prescription drug prices for all Americans, to improve Medicare for current beneficiaries by adding dental, vision, and hearing services and capping out-of-pocket costs, and to lower the Medicare eligibility age to at least 60.

The United States spends far more than any other country for pharmaceuticals, and the largest purchaser in the world is the Medicare Part D program. High U.S. drug spending is driven by excessive prices charged by prescription drug corporations, which lead to treatment rationing and preventable negative health outcomes, including death. Enacting a robust system of direct government drug price negotiation and price spike protections that provides relief to patients regardless of medical condition, insurance provider or status will save lives and prevent suffering and financial hardship for families across the nation. Advancing the strongest reform possible is not only the right thing to do in its own right, but stronger reform also has potential to provide greater savings for reinvestment. Conversely, any weakening of drug pricing reform would reduce savings. Bold drug pricing reform will support building a healthier America, as well as produce hundreds of billions of dollars in savings to reinvest in bolstering coverage.

It is also time to enact critical improvements to Medicare's coverage. Given the challenges seniors faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to deliver the relief that they need. Coming out of the crisis, many seniors will need additional services. Adding an out-of-pocket cap for medical expenses and expanding access to dental, hearing and vision services would go a long way in improving access to needed care.

In addition, by lowering the Medicare eligibility age to at least 60, Congress could deliver crucial progress on expanding health care. Americans approaching retirement age have faced significant job loss as a result of the recession brought on by the pandemic and are at a particular disadvantage in states that have refused to expand Medicaid, leaving low-income Americans in those states particularly at risk of going without coverage and needed care. And given that most

people experience increased medical needs as they age, lacking insurance at such a crucial time can mean financial ruin.

Far too many Americans continue to struggle to get the care and medicine that they need when they need it. Establishing government drug price negotiations and price spike protections will provide countless Americans with relief and put an end to treatment rationing. Expanding Medicare to those 60 and older would mean giving the peace of mind that Medicare enrollees already have to an additional 544,000 Virginians and 20 million Americans. Now is the time for action to lower drug prices and improve access to care for millions.

Sincerely,

350 Alexandria

Activate Virginia

Church World Service

Communications Workers of America Virginia State

Fairfax County Federation of Teachers (AFT Local 2401)

Green New Deal Virginia

Herndon-Reston Indivisible

Indivisible Below the Beltway

Indivisible Floyd/Patrick

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Virginia (NAMI Virginia)

Network NOVA

Our Revolution

Our Revolution Alexandria

Our Revolution Northern Virginia

Our Revolution South Central Virginia

Our Revolution Virginia

Progressive Democrats of America-Virginia

Public Citizen

RVA Interfaith Climate Justice League

The National Korean American Service and Education Consortium - Virginia (NAKASEC VA)

Virginia Chapter, National Organization for Women (Virginia NOW, Inc.)

Virginia Justice Democrats

Virginia Organizing