

Strong RX Pricing Reforms and Improvements to the Medicare Dental Provisions Must be Included in the Final Reconciliation Package

September 20, 2021

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Chairman Wyden,

We write to you today, in light of the House Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce Committee votes on their portions of the reconciliation package this week regarding improvements to the Medicare program. The undersigned organizations representing diverse interests, including consumer safety, public health, business, faith-based, racial justice and labor organizations, urge you to build on the positive reforms in the House package by including the Ways and Means Committee proposal to lower drug prices, improving the expanded Medicare dental benefits that were passed in both committees, and further improving and expanding Medicare by capping out of pocket expenses for Medicare beneficiaries and lowering the Medicare eligibility age to at least 60.

We applaud the inclusion of provisions by the Ways and Means Committee to lower prescription drug prices for both Medicare beneficiaries, and individuals with group health plans or coverage offered in the group or individual market, and are extremely disappointed in the tie vote in the Energy and Commerce Committee that failed to advance those drug price reform provisions. We are committed to ensuring that the Ways and Means proposal is included in the final House bill.

We strongly encourage the Senate to protect and improve upon these reforms when they consider the Build Back Better Act. Negotiations and price spike protections should apply to a wide array of prescription drugs, extend beyond Medicare and be strictly enforced. Medicare negotiations should bring our prices closer to those paid in other large, wealthy countries. Advancing the strongest reform possible is not only the right thing to do in its own right, but stronger reform also has the potential to provide hundreds of billions of dollars in savings to reinvest in bolstering coverage. Conversely, any weakening of drug pricing reform would reduce savings.

With significant savings from lowering drug prices, it is a crucial time to address other needs of Medicare enrollees and improve health care for millions of older Americans. Given the challenges seniors faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to deliver the relief they need. The House reconciliation bill rightfully includes expanded access to dental, hearing and vision services for Medicare beneficiaries; however, as it is currently written, the House bill requires an unaffordable level of cost-sharing for dental services that will prevent millions of Medicare beneficiaries from using the benefit. Further, the House bill will not phase in the dental benefit until 2028, leaving older adults without the dental care they need for far too long. The bill also leaves out the 23 million older adults who would gain healthcare coverage through lowering the Medicare eligibility age to at least 60 years of age, and fails to cap the out-of-pocket costs that can be impossible for older Americans to pay.

President Biden has been very clear that his vision for recovery must meet the needs and priorities of BIPOC communities. Swiftly phasing-in Medicare benefit expansion to include comprehensive dental

services with no copays and lowering the eligibility age would help increase coverage and access to care for communities of color who are disproportionately uninsured or underinsured.

While the Ways and Means committee included important reforms to expand and improve Medicare, far more must be done to meet the urgency and need of today. We call on Congressional leadership to build upon the House reconciliation legislation—not cave to the pharmaceutical lobby’s demands—by protecting the prescription drug pricing reforms, including comprehensive dental, vision and hearing benefits in Medicare with improvements to the Medicare dental benefits so that all seniors have access to dental care as soon as possible, adding an out of pocket cap for Medicare beneficiaries, and lowering the eligibility age to at least 60 in the final reconciliation package.

Sincerely,

ACA Consumer Advocacy
African American Health Alliance
AFSCME 3800 - University of Minnesota Clerical Workers
Allergy & Asthma Network
Arizona Chapter, Progressive Democrats of America
AZ Medicare for All Coalition
Be a Hero
Bridging The Gap In Virginia
Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division- IBT
Campaign for NY Health
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Center for Popular Democracy
Church World Service
Citizen Action of Wisconsin
Coalition of Labor Union Women, AFL-CIO
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Consumer Action
Delaware Chapter, Progressive Democrats of America
Doctors For America
Florida Chapter of Progressive Democrats of America
Green New Deal Virginia
Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Health Care for All Oregon-Action
Health Care Justice--NC
Health Care Voices
Healthcare-NOW
Indivisible
Indivisible NJ5
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Jane Addams Senior Caucus
Just Care USA
Justice Democrats
Labor Campaign for Single Payer
Maine People's Alliance
Mass. ME/CFS and FM Assoc
Metro New York Health Care for All
Minnesota Nurses Association
Monmouth County Democratic Progressive Caucus
MoveOn
NASW, WV Chapter
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Nurses United
National Organization for Women
National Union of Healthcare Workers
Nevada Chapter, Progressive Democrats of America
ONE Northside
Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens/United Seniors of Oregon
Our Revolution
Our Revolution Monmouth
Our Revolution Northern Virginia
People's Action
Physicians for a National Health Program - Washington
Planned Parenthood South Atlantic
Portland Jobs with Justice
Progressive Democrats of America
Progressive Democrats of America CA
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Citizen
R2H Action [Right to Health]
Rights & Democracy
Rise Up WV
SC Alliance for Retired Americans
TakeAction Minnesota
Tennessee Health Care Campaign
Treatment Action Group
United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE)
United Vision For Idaho
Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut

Virginia Chapter, Progressive Democrats of America
Virginia Justice Democrats
Washington Community Action Network
WV Citizen Action Group