

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2009

Paul Precht, Director of Policy and Communications
Medicare Rights Center
202-544-5561
pprecht@medicarerights.org

Akiko Takano, Deputy Director of Communications
Medicare Rights Center
212-204-6214
atakano@medicarerights.org

Dozens of Patient Advocacy Groups Support Legislation to Eliminate Two-Year Medicare Waiting Period

WASHINGTON, DC – The Coalition to End the Two-Year Wait for Medicare, over 120 organizations who work to ensure access to health care for people with disabilities, enthusiastically supports the introduction of **Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2009**, S.700 and H.R.1708, which would eliminate the unjustifiable two-year delay in coverage for people with severe disabilities who are waiting to become eligible for Medicare coverage.

“Nearly 40 percent of people with disabilities are without health insurance coverage at some point during their wait for Medicare; 24 percent have no health insurance during this entire period. Many cannot afford to pay COBRA premiums to maintain coverage from their former employer, and private coverage on the individual market is unavailable or too expensive for this high-cost population,” the Coalition wrote to Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Representative Gene Green (D-TX).

“The waiting period forces people with severe disabilities to endure two years during which treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. As a result, people may forego care they cannot afford, complicating their condition and potentially raising the cost of care once Medicare does step in,” **said Kimberly Cantor, Manager of Federal Government Relations from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society**. “This means that costs to Medicare will likely be higher once the end of the waiting period is reached.”

“Our efforts to expand coverage to the uninsured must include people with disabilities and their families who struggle to pay medical bills and afford food and housing as they wait for Medicare coverage to begin,” **said Diane Dorman, Vice President for Public Policy for the National Organization of Rare Diseases**. “This arbitrary and cruel delay in health coverage for the most vulnerable among us must end.”

Efforts by Congress and the new administration to address America’s health care crisis provide a unique opportunity to end the two-year waiting period. As a senator, President Barack Obama was a cosponsor of the Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2007 when it was introduced into the 110th Congress.

(letter and coalition members below).

End the Two-Year Wait for Medicare

March 26, 2009

Honorable Senator Jeff Bingaman
703 Hart Senate Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Gene Green
2372 Rayburn House Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Bingaman and Congressman Green,

The Coalition to End the Two-Year Wait for Medicare enthusiastically supports S.700 and H.R.1708, your legislation to eliminate the unjustifiable delay in coverage for a group of Americans most in need of access to health care — the estimated 1.8 million people with severe disabilities who are waiting to become eligible for Medicare coverage. The Coalition represents over 120 organizations of patient advocates and health care providers who have joined together to urge Congress to make coverage for people with disabilities a priority as it begins the process of addressing national health care reform.

With health care reform on the horizon, there is a unique opportunity to close this unjustifiable gap in health care coverage for people with disabilities. Nearly 40 percent of people with disabilities are without health insurance coverage at some point during their wait for Medicare; 24 percent have no health insurance during this entire period. We support your legislation which will phase-out the waiting period for all people with disabilities over ten years, while immediately eliminating the waiting period for people with life-threatening conditions.

The waiting period forces people with severe disabilities to endure two years, during which treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. Many forgo medical treatment and/or stop taking medications, compromising their already fragile health and resulting ultimately in conditions that are often more costly to treat when Medicare coverage finally begins.

No one with a disability severe enough to qualify for SSDI should be without health coverage. We look forward to working with you to ensure passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

ACCSES
Advocacy for Patients with Chronic Illness, Inc.
AIDS Action Baltimore, Inc.
AIDS Charitable Trust of New Mexico
AIDS Treatment Data Network
AIDS Treatment News
Alpha-1 Association
Alpha-1 Foundation

Alzheimer's Association
 American Academy of Neurology
 American Association for International Aging
 American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
 American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)
 American Council of the Blind (ACB)
 American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)
 American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association (AMRPA)
 American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)
 American Psychological Association
 Amputee Coalition of America
 Amyloidosis Support Groups
 Arthritis Foundation
 Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
 Association for Frontotemporal Dementias
 Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP)
 Association of Community Cancer Centers
 Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)
 Association of University Centers on Disabilities
 Barrier Free Living, Inc.
 Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
 Benign Essential Blepharospasm Research Foundation (BEBRF)
 Breast Cancer Network of Strength
 Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled
 Catskill Center for Independence
 Center for Disability Rights, Inc.
 Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York
 Center for Medicare Advocacy
 Children's Tumor Foundation
 Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis
 Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.
 Commission on the Public's Health System (CPHS)
 Community AIDS National Network (TIICANN)
 Community Health Charities of America
 COPD Foundation
 Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
 Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
 Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
 Easter Seals
 Ehlers Danlos National Foundation
 Epilepsy Foundation
 Families USA
 Friends of Jazz
 Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York
 Harlem Independent Living Center
 Hispanic Senior Action Council
 HIV Medicine Association
 HIV/AIDS Services for African Americans in Alaska
 HIVictorious, Inc.
 Incontinentia Pigmenti International Foundation
 Independence Care System
 International Foundation for Alternative Research in AIDS (IFARA)
 International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation
 Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, Inc.
 Kennedy's Disease Association
 Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
 Lupus Foundation of America
 Medicare Rights Center
 Men's Health Network
 Mental Health America
 Michigan Positive Action Coalition (MI-POZ)
 Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities
 Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America (MGFA)
 National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA)
 National Adult Protective Services Association
 National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD)
 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
 National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)
 National Association of People with AIDS
 National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS)
 National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
 National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM)
 National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
 National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
 National Disability Rights Network
 National Down Syndrome Congress
 National Family Caregivers Association

National Foundation for Dentistry for the
Handicapped
National Gray Panthers
National Health Council
National Marfan Foundation
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization of Rare Disorders
(NORD)
National Organization of Social Security
Claimants' Representatives (NOSSCR)
National Patient Advocate Foundation
New Mexico AIDS Services
New York Citizens' Committee on Aging
NISH
North American Brain Tumor Coalition (NABTC)
NTM Info & Research
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Parent to Parent of NY State
Parents United Together of Mississippi
Pulmonary Hypertension Association
Options for Independence, Inc.
Regional Center for Independent Living
The Resource Center for Accessible Living, Inc.
Rose F. Kennedy University Center for
Excellence in Developmental
Disabilities, Albert Einstein College of
Medicine
Scleroderma Foundation
Shwachman Diamond Syndrome Foundation
Southern Tier Independence Center
Special Needs Alliance
Spina Bifida Association
Syncope Trust and Reflex Anoxic Seizures
(STARS)
The AIDS Institute
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
United Jewish Communities
United Spinal Association
Village Care of New York
Westchester Independent Living Center
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement