



February 8, 2018

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our members and all Americans age 50 and older, I am writing to express AARP's views on the budget deal and continuing resolution (CR). AARP, with its nearly 38 million members in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as health care, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

AARP has long supported the full repeal of Medicare's arbitrary limit on physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and occupational therapy services. We strongly support the bicameral, bipartisan policy included in the budget deal that would replace the temporary exceptions process with a permanent fix that ensures care is delivered to vulnerable patients, protects beneficiaries from high out-of-pocket costs, and safeguards the long-term viability of the Medicare program.

AARP also supports the expedited closing of the Medicare Part D coverage gap or "donut hole." As a result of the changes enacted as part of the Affordable Care Act, over 12 million Medicare beneficiaries in the Part D coverage gap have saved over \$26 billion since 2010. We are extremely pleased that the budget deal accelerates the donut hole closure to 2019. As a result of this legislation, in 2019, Medicare beneficiaries will receive permanent relief from higher out-of-pocket costs when they enter the Part D donut hole. We are also pleased that this legislation adds biosimilars to the Medicare Part D Coverage Gap Discount Program, which both lower out-of-pocket costs for beneficiaries and encourages the development and use of biosimilars.

AARP also supports passage of other health care "extenders", as well as other policies, which improve chronic care management, increase access, and fund important programs – all-important steps to improving care for millions of Medicare beneficiaries. In particular, we support:

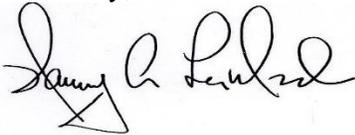
- Extending the Independence at Home Demonstration;
- Implementing an easily navigable unified grievance and appeal process for dual eligible special needs plans that adopts important enrollee protections, the continuation of benefits pending appeal, and efforts to improve integration of long-term services and supports and behavioral health;
- Allowing Medicare Advantage plans to offer a wider range of supplemental benefits to improve or maintain the health or overall function of a chronically ill enrollee;

- Expanding the use of telehealth in Medicare; and
- Extending funding under Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act and for quality measurement development.

However, we remain opposed to the inclusion of changes to increase premiums for Medicare Part B and Part D beneficiaries. Inclusion of higher income-related premiums -- affecting beneficiaries who already pay more in monthly premiums, more in payroll taxes over a working lifetime, and an additional tax on their Social Security benefits dedicated to the Medicare program -- risk driving better off seniors out of the Medicare program, and undermining support for Medicare. Further, this provision shifts more costs onto Medicare beneficiaries when the cost-shifts from the last time Congress asked beneficiaries to pay more -- in MACRA (P.L. 114-10) -- are just now beginning to take effect.

As the debate continues, we urge you to work together on a bipartisan basis to ensure that any final package includes these important health care improvements without shifting more costs onto Medicare beneficiaries. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me, or have your staff contact Joyce Rogers, Senior Vice President for AARP Government Affairs, at (202) 434-3750.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy A. LeMond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "L".

Nancy A. LeMond
Executive Vice President and Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer