

Access to Critical Medications Coalition

July 12th, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2109 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ensure Coverage of Lifesaving Medications for Medicare Beneficiaries

Dear Chairman Dingell and Ranking Member Barton:

We, the undersigned organizations, belong to the Access to Critical Medications Coalition – a diverse group of national and community-based patient, provider and advocacy organizations dedicated to ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries with HIV/AIDS, mental illnesses, epilepsy, cancer, organ failure, and autoimmune diseases have reliable access through Medicare Part D to the prescriptions that they need to stay healthy.

We urge you to strengthen protections for these medically vulnerable populations by codifying the requirement that Medicare Part D plans cover “all or substantially all” drugs in the six classes of drugs that are critical to treating HIV/AIDS, mental illnesses, cancer, epilepsy, autoimmune diseases such as Crohn’s, and transplant patients. Coverage of nearly all of the drugs in these categories is standard practice among state Medicaid programs and private insurers because it is more cost effective and better for people with these conditions when clinicians have the flexibility to prescribe the drug or drugs most appropriate to manage the condition according to factors unique to them.

We are concerned that the current protections offered through the CMS guidance are not guaranteed beyond the current year and are being ignored by drug plans with no risk of sanctions. Surveys of HIV and mental health medical providers indicate that Medicare beneficiaries with these conditions have been hospitalized or experienced dangerous treatment interruptions due to challenges with Medicare Part D coverage. Many of the beneficiaries reporting problems are very low-income and live on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) checks or modest disability payments. Paying out of pocket for drugs denied by Medicare Part D drug plans is not an option for most.

Medicare beneficiaries with these life-threatening illnesses are counting on you to codify the requirement that Medicare Part D drug plans cover “all or substantially all” of the drugs available to treat these serious, but treatable conditions. Their health and lives depend on it.

Sincerely,
The Access to Critical Medications Coalition

**AIDS Institute • American Academy of HIV Medicine • American Academy of Neurology
American Psychiatric Association • Cancer Leadership Council • Epilepsy Foundation
HIV Medicine Association • Mental Health America • National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors • National Kidney Foundation
Project Inform • The TEN Project**

CC: Members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce

**For more information:
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