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Dialysis Patient Advocates Urge Congress to Improve Kidney Disease Research and Care

Bipartisan legislation would strengthen kidney disease research, care coordination and patient choice

Washington, D.C. – Advocates for dialysis patients announced their strong support of bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress last week that would augment research on kidney disease, improve coordination among kidney care providers and expand coverage options for patients with kidney failure, also called end-stage renal disease (ESRD).

The Chronic Kidney Disease Improvement in Research and Treatment Act (H.R. 2644) would improve the care of the more than 675,000 ESRD patients nationwide who require transplantation or frequent dialysis treatments to survive. Dialysis Patient Citizens (DPC), a leading advocacy group for people with kidney disease that represents nearly 30,000 dialysis and pre-dialysis patients, is particularly pleased with the bill's expansion of access to Medigap coverage for all ESRD patients under age 65.

People with kidney failure are eligible for Medicare regardless of their age, but unlike traditional beneficiaries of the program, ESRD patients under age 65 do not have guaranteed access to Medigap plans that cover health care services not included in Medicare. ESRD patients under age 65 are prohibited in 23 states from buying Medigap coverage, leaving them liable for 20 percent of their health care costs.

"Medicare covers most health care costs, but patients without a supplementary policy must pay co-insurance, co-pays and deductibles out-of-pocket, which can cause serious financial strain," said Hrant Jamgochian, chief executive of DPC and a kidney disease patient. "Without access to supplemental plans, ESRD patients under age 65 often must spend down their assets to become Medicaid eligible, a result that is financially devastating for patients and more costly for the health care system."

When Medigap plans were first introduced, Congress guaranteed their issue to traditional Medicare beneficiaries but did not extend this policy to people who gain Medicare coverage prior to age 65, including ESRD patients. The legislation, introduced by Reps. John Lewis (D-GA), Tom Marino (R-PA) and Peter Roskam (R-IL), would make all ESRD patients eligible to purchase Medigap coverage regardless of where they live.

"For years, dialysis patients have been urging Congress to amend federal law to clarify that all Medicare beneficiaries, no matter their age, should be able to buy Medigap plans available in their state,"

Jamgochian said. “We urge lawmakers to take swift action to pass this bill so people with kidney failure have the choice of coverage options they deserve.”

For more information, visit the [DPC website](#).

Dialysis Patient Citizens is America’s largest patient-led organization representing dialysis patients, DPC’s membership consists of more than 28,000 dialysis and pre-dialysis patients and their families.

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