



Medicare Rights Center

April 11, 2007

Honorable Charles B. Rangel
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Pete Stark
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Jim McCrery
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Dave Camp
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health
U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen:

The rising cost of health insurance and the increasing ranks of the uninsured are among the top domestic priorities for the 110th Congress.

The undersigned organizations work to ensure access to health care for people with disabilities, individuals who are extremely vulnerable to the loss of coverage under our current, fractured health care system. As Congress addresses America's health care crisis, we urge you to place a high priority on closing the gap in coverage that affects a group of Americans most in need of guaranteed access to health care—people with severe disabilities who are waiting to become eligible for Medicare coverage.

In 1972, Congress extended Medicare coverage to individuals determined by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to have a disability that prevents gainful employment. Since then, Medicare has provided access to health care for millions of people with disabilities, allowing them to access the health care they need to lead lives as healthfully as possible. In extending Medicare coverage, however, Congress mandated a two-year waiting period for Medicare coverage from the date of eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits.

Over the decades, the rising cost of private insurance coverage has put COBRA coverage out of reach for Americans living on Social Security Disability Insurance. In addition, many people who qualify for disability income become ineligible for Medicaid, especially with budget pressures forcing states to restrict eligibility criteria. The waiting period has forced people with severe disabilities to endure two years during which

treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. There are an estimated 1.5 million Americans with disabilities stuck in the waiting period for Medicare. Between one quarter and 40 percent of these individuals do not have health coverage.

The two-year Medicare waiting period affects more than those individuals who are now struggling to survive until their Medicare coverage begins. Every American is at risk of a severely disabling illness or accident. For individuals with progressive illnesses that all but guarantee that they will one day have to file for disability, this built-in gap in coverage is a virtual certainty.

We urge you to take action in this Congress to eliminate the two-year Medicare waiting period for people with disabilities. After being deemed disabled by SSA, Americans with disabilities should receive Medicare coverage as soon as they begin receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits.

ACCESS-DSPA Alliance
Alzheimer's Association
American Association of People with
Disabilities (AAPD)
American Council of the Blind
American Dance Therapy Association
American Medical Rehabilitation
Providers Association
American Network of Community
Options and Resources
The Arc
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Assistive Technology Act
Programs (ATAP)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Families USA

Lupus Foundation of America
Medicare Rights Center
Mental Health America
National Association of State Directors
of Special Education
National Council for Community
Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Society
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Respite Coalition
NISH
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Rehabilitation Engineering and
Assistive Technology Society of North
America (RESNA)
RESULTS
Title II Community AIDS National
Network (TIICANN)
United Cerebral Palsy
United Spinal Association

cc: Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance

Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance

Honorable John D. Rockefeller, IV
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health Care
Senate Committee on Finance

Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care
Senate Committee on Finance