



June 23, 2008

The Honorable John Dingell, Chairman
Energy & Commerce Committee

The Honorable Charles Rangel, Chairman
Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Dingell and Rangel:

On behalf of the National Council on Aging (NCOA) – the nation’s first organization formed to represent America’s seniors and those who serve them – we write to express our strong support for H.R. 6331, the *Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act*. In addition to addressing the physician payment problem, the bill includes a number of long overdue, direct improvements for Medicare beneficiaries.

Central to NCOA’s mission is ensuring that vulnerable, low-income beneficiaries are enrolled in the available needs-based benefits for which they are eligible. Millions of low-income beneficiaries are struggling with rising health, food and gasoline costs, but are still not receiving the assistance they need under Medicare and Medicaid. The Medicare Prescription Drug Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) and Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) provide significant assistance to vulnerable beneficiaries with rapidly rising premiums and cost-sharing, helping those in greatest need to remain healthier, independent, and in their own homes longer.

NCOA has been advocating for a variety of specific improvements to the LIS and MSP programs, many of which are included in H.R. 6331. We are particularly pleased that the following significant improvements are included in the bill:

- adjusting MSP asset eligibility levels, which have not been adjusted for inflation in over 20 years, thereby penalizing poor seniors - mostly widows - with modest nest eggs;
- providing additional funding for finding and enrolling poor beneficiaries in low-income assistance programs;
- eliminating the Medicare Part D LIS late enrollment premium penalty;
- simplifying the LIS application form; and
- translating the MSP model application form into other languages.

In addition, we are pleased that provisions are included to expand coverage for preventive care, reduce copayments for mental health services, and strengthen managed care consumer protections, while beginning to level the playing field for Private Fee-For-Service plans.

In addition to strong support from NCOA and other organizations representing seniors, the low-income beneficiary improvements in H.R. 6331 are supported by a large majority of Americans. A recent nationwide Harris Interactive Poll found that almost 90 percent of Americans (80 percent of Republicans) believe that improving programs to protect poor seniors against rising Medicare costs should be a top priority for Congress this year.

Thank you for your strong leadership on behalf of older Americans. We urge members of Congress to support the *Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act* and look forward to working with you and your staff to enact these important provisions into law this year.

Sincerely,

Howard Bedlin
Vice-President, Public Policy & Advocacy