



United States Senator

Kent Conrad

www.conrad.senate.gov

North Dakota

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Dear Friend:

Whether you live in a big city like Fargo or a small town like Fortuna, every North Dakotan deserves quality, affordable health care right in their own community. Since I came to the U.S. Senate 22 years ago, health care has been one of my top priorities.

Congress took a major step toward ensuring quality, affordable and accessible health care when we voted earlier this summer to overturn a White House veto and passed a bipartisan Medicare bill that will improve health care for all North Dakota families.

Medicare matters not only to seniors, but to everyone. The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 helps traditional Medicare seniors. But by injecting tens of millions of dollars into North Dakota to help fix unbalanced Medicare reimbursements for hospitals, doctors and other providers, the legislation strengthens our state's broader health care network – meaning better health care for everyone.

Health care is not a partisan issue, it is a patient issue. And with the passage of this Medicare bill, North Dakota patients will be more certain of seeing a doctor when in need.

Sincerely,

KENT CONRAD

United States Senator

Health Care Policy Alerts

Interested in learning more? You can receive health care policy updates directly in your email in-box. Visit www.conrad.senate.gov and sign up for regular updates from Senator Conrad on issue areas that are important to you.



Grand Forks: Senator Conrad visits with seniors after a presentation on the Medicare prescription drug benefit program.

A Doctor When You Need One

When Congress overturned the President's veto of the Medicare bill this summer it averted a 10 percent payment cut for doctors who treat Medicare patients. Many doctors told Senator Conrad that the White House cuts would have forced health care providers to turn away seniors. Instead of cutting health care, the bipartisan Medicare bill passed by Congress increases reimbursement rates, so doctors and hospitals can continue to care for traditional Medicare patients. This boost in funding will go a long way to ensuring North Dakotans continue to receive the best possible health care.

There are more than 105,000 people in North Dakota who qualify for Medicare.

Working to Level the Playing Field

Although health care professionals in North Dakota provide some of the best care in the country, they receive some of the lowest Medicare reimbursement payments. In some instances, North Dakota hospitals get half as much as hospitals in more urban states for treating the same disease. That's unfair, and the Medicare bill passed by Congress helps level the playing field by extending Section 508, a Medicare program created by Senator Conrad in 2003, that fixes reimbursement formulas. Many North Dakota hospitals use Section 508 to help retain nurses, doctors and other trained medical staff. The North Dakota Hospital Association said the measures would mean more than \$10 million over the next year.

Keeping Hospital Doors Open in Dickinson and Richardton

Senator Conrad worked with community and hospital leadership to create a new Medicare grant program to support Richardton Memorial Hospitals transition to either a nursing home or an assisted living center. The new program could mean up to \$1 million in federal funds for Richardton. This is important because it means Richardton hospital's status as a Critical Access Hospital (CAH) can be transferred to St. Joseph's Hospital in Dickinson. By obtaining that CAH status, St. Joseph's will see an increase in Medicare reimbursement rates which will help the hospital avert a financial crisis.

"We need to keep the doors of hospitals in Dickinson and Richardton open. These are health care providers, but they are also major employers and anchors for the local economy of these towns," Senator Conrad said.



Washington: At a summit for national health care leaders, Senator Conrad discusses legislation he introduced to increase access to telehealth technology.

Bringing Cutting Edge Technology to North Dakota

For 15 years, Senator Conrad has worked to bring cutting-edge health care technology, called “telemedicine,” to North Dakota. This evolving technology allows patients in remote, rural communities to consult medical specialists via videoconferencing and the Internet. In 1993, Senator Conrad formed the U.S. Senate’s Steering Committee on Telehealth to expand telehealth and have it covered by Medicare.

The hard work paid off with the new Medicare bill, which allows nursing homes, dialysis centers and community health centers to host telehealth services. This cuts down on travel, allows the facility to recoup a Medicare fee for its service and means more seniors will have access to telemedicine services.

Boosting Rural Ambulance Squads

The Medicare bill passed by Congress includes Senator Conrad’s legislation to boost payments for ambulance services, a key link to emergency health care in North Dakota. The legislation provides a 3-percent add-on payment for rural providers and a 2-percent add-on for urban ambulance services.



Bismarck: Paramedics join Senator Conrad to highlight his legislation to boost payments for rural ambulance services.

Annual Update for Dialysis Providers

The Medicare bill includes a provision authored by Senator Conrad to make sure North Dakotans suffering from chronic kidney disease have access to life saving dialysis treatments. Senator Conrad’s provision ensures that dialysis providers receive a permanent, annual update to help keep pace with inflation and are able to keep their doors open to serve patients in need.

Bringing More Doctors to North Dakota’s Communities

America is facing a growing crisis with a shortage of doctors. By 2020, some projections show the nation may fall short by as many as 200,000 physicians. Rural communities will feel the shortfall the hardest. Senator Conrad is working to reverse this trend. In 1994 he created the State 30 program, a national initiative that brings foreign-born but American-trained doctors to underserved, rural areas plagued by physician shortfalls.

“The Conrad State 30 program is saving lives. Without it, patients across North Dakota would be forced to travel great distances to obtain the quality care they need,” said Mary Amundson, an assistant professor at UND’s Center for Rural Health.

NEED ASSISTANCE WITH MEDICARE?

For general Medicare information, or information about health plans, contact 1-800-MEDICARE 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A customer service representative at this number can answer questions about Medicare and provide up-to-date information regarding the drug plans available in your area.



Fargo: Senator Conrad meets with seniors to discuss the Medicare prescription drug program.



Senator Kent Conrad's

Health Care Report

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