



For Immediate Release
April 18, 2008

Contact: Erin Shields (Baucus)
Jill Gerber (Grassley)
(202) 224-4515

BAUCUS, GRASSLEY APPLAUD STEPS TO BOOST MEDICARE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Senators championed quality improvement plan that will result in better care to seniors

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) are commending the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for enacting improvements to the agency’s Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI). In an announcement Thursday, the agency said it will do more to encourage doctors to report data on quality measures for services they provide to Medicare beneficiaries. The agency said it will implement a number of new reporting options that will make it less burdensome for doctors to participate in the program and generate more meaningful data about quality of care. The senators said today that while much remains to be done to improve Medicare quality, they are pleased that CMS is following the recommendations that they made for the program in a letter to the agency in January of this year.

“Expanding the physician quality reporting initiative will improve care and encourage the development of more meaningful, evidence-based ways to measure quality,” said Baucus. **“The improvements CMS is making will drive the creation of better models for collecting and analyzing clinical information. This move is a step in the right direction on the long, careful path toward linking physician payments to the quality of care they provide. We still have a ways to go, but I applaud CMS for its efforts. I’ll continue working with the agency to ensure that seniors receive the best possible care.”**

“This administrative step moves Medicare towards rewarding better quality care by eliminating certain barriers to quality reporting,” said Grassley. **“Facilitating participation, providing new incentives and establishing additional ways to quality are all part of continuing to improve the Medicare program for beneficiaries.”**

The CMS announcement yesterday indicated that for 2008, in addition to submitting PQRI measure data as part of their Medicare claims submissions, doctors may report data on quality measures to a medical registry, and these registries will then report that data to CMS. In addition to providing new flexibility for submitting data, registry-based reporting will provide more comprehensive, clinical data about the quality of care physicians deliver. Participating doctors can choose to report data on either individual measures or on groups of measures that capture a number of data elements about care delivered to patients with complex illnesses like diabetes and chronic kidney disease.

Another change under the enhanced PQRI program for 2008 will be new PQRI reporting periods for doctors who report using measures groups. Physicians may now start reporting in July 2008 and still be eligible to earn an incentive payment for the 2008 PQRI program. More information on the changes CMS announced today is available from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at www.cms.gov.

In 2006, Baucus and Grassley helped to create the PQRI program, which provides an increased Medicare reimbursement to doctors and other medical professionals who report data on measures of quality of care. Since then, the Senators have championed the program by including improvements in the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act of 2007, and detailing recommendations for expansion in a January 2008 letter to CMS. More information on the senators's letter to CMS is available on the Finance Committee website at <http://www.finance.senate.gov/press/Bpress/2008press/prb012408a.pdf>.

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