

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Paul Precht  
Director for Policy and Communications  
202-544-5561  
[pprecht@medicarerights.org](mailto:pprecht@medicarerights.org)

Akiko Takano  
Deputy Director of Communications  
212-204-6214  
[atakano@medicarerights.org](mailto:atakano@medicarerights.org)

***Dozens of Patient Advocacy Groups Support Legislation to Eliminate  
Two-Year Medicare Waiting Period***

**WASHINGTON, DC** – The Coalition to End the Two-Year Wait for Medicare, over 65 organizations who work to ensure access to health care for people with disabilities, enthusiastically supports the introduction of **Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2009**, which would eliminate the unjustifiable two-year wait that people with severe disabilities are forced to endure before they become eligible for Medicare coverage.

“Nearly 40 percent of people with disabilities are without health insurance coverage at some point during their wait for Medicare; 24 percent have no health insurance during this entire period. Many cannot afford to pay COBRA premiums to maintain coverage from their former employer, and private coverage on the individual market is unavailable or too expensive for this high-cost population,” says the Coalition’s letter to Senator Jeffrey Bingaman (D-NM) and Representative Gene Green (D-TX).

“The waiting period forces people with severe disabilities to endure two years during which treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. As a result, people may forgo care they cannot afford, complicating their condition and potentially raising the cost of care once Medicare does step in,” **said Kimberly Cantor, Manager of Federal Government Relations from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society**. “This means that costs to Medicare will likely be higher once the end of the waiting period is reached.”

“Our efforts to expand coverage to the uninsured must include people with disabilities who struggle to pay medical bills and afford food and housing as they wait for Medicare coverage to begin,” said **Diane Dorman, Vice President for Public Policy for the**

**National Organization of Rare Diseases.** “This arbitrary and cruel delay in health coverage for the most vulnerable among us must end.”

Efforts by Congress and the new administration to address America’s health care crisis provide a unique opportunity to end the two-year waiting period. As a senator, President Barack Obama was a cosponsor of the Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2007 when it was introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

(letter and list of coalition members below)

January 27, 2009

Honorable Senator Bingaman and Honorable Congressman Green,

The Coalition to End the Two-Year Wait for Medicare enthusiastically supports your legislation to eliminate the unjustifiable delay in coverage for a group of Americans most in need of access to health care— people with severe disabilities who are waiting to become eligible for Medicare coverage. The Coalition represents over 65 organizations of patient advocates and health care providers who have joined together to urge Congress to make coverage for people with disabilities a priority as they begin the process of addressing national health care reform.

With health care reform on the horizon, there is a unique opportunity to close this unjustifiable gap in health care coverage for people with disabilities. Your legislation would eliminate the waiting period for people with disabilities, ensuring that Medicare becomes available at the time of an individual’s SSDI eligibility.

Nearly 40 percent of people with disabilities are without health insurance coverage at some point during their wait for Medicare; 24 percent have no health insurance during this entire period. Many cannot afford to pay COBRA premiums to maintain coverage from their former employer, and private coverage on the individual market is unavailable or too expensive for this high-cost population.

The waiting period forces people with severe disabilities to endure two years during which treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. Many forgo medical treatment and/or stop taking medications, compromising their already fragile health and resulting ultimately in conditions that are often more costly to treat when Medicare coverage finally begins.

No one with a disability severe enough to qualify for SSDI should be without health insurance. We look forward to working with you to ensure passage of this important legislation.

**Advocacy for Patients with Chronic Illness, Inc.**

**Alzheimer's Association**  
**American Academy of Neurology**  
**American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA)**  
**American Congress of Community Supports and Employment Services (ACCSES)**  
**American Council for the Blind (ACB)**  
**American Foundation for the Blind**  
**American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)**  
**Amyloidosis Support Groups**  
**Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)**  
**Arthritis Foundation**  
**Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare**  
**Association for Frontotemporal Dementias**  
**Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)**  
**Autism Society of America**  
**Bazon Center for Mental Health Law**  
**Brain Injury Association of America**  
**Breast Cancer Network of Strength**  
**Cancer Action Network (American Cancer Society)**  
**Center for Medicare Advocacy**  
**Children's Tumor Foundation**  
**Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis**  
**Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America**  
**Cystic Fibrosis Foundation**  
**Easter Seals**  
**Ehlers Danlos National Foundation**  
**Families USA**  
**HIV Medicine Association**  
**Incontinencia Pigmenti International Foundation**  
**Independence Care System**  
**International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation**  
**Kennedy's Disease Association**  
**Leukemia & Lymphoma Society**  
**Lupus Foundation of America**  
**Medicare Rights Center**  
**Mental Health America**  
**Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities**  
**Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America (MGFA)**  
**National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA)**  
**National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD)**  
**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**  
**National Association of People with AIDS**  
**National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare**  
**National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare**  
**National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)**  
**National Disability Rights Network**  
**National Health Council**

**National Marfan Foundation**  
**National Multiple Sclerosis Society**  
**National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives (NOSSCR)**  
**National Patient Advocate Foundation**  
**NISH**  
**National Organization of Rare Diseases (NORD)**  
**North American Brain Tumor Coalition (NABTC)**  
**Parents United Together of Mississippi**  
**Paralyzed Veterans of America**  
**Pulmonary Hypertension Association**  
**Scleroderma Foundation**  
**Shwachman Diamond Syndrome Foundation**  
**Spina Bifida Association**  
**STARS**  
**The AIDS Institute**  
**The Arc of the United States**  
**United Cerebral Palsy**  
**United Spinal Association**  
**Village Care of New York**

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