



Partnership For Prevention

Better Health Through the Power of Prevention

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June 2, 2004

The Honorable Bob Graham
United States Senator
524 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0903

Dear Senator Graham,

Thank you for requesting Partnership for Prevention's comments on Medicare policy concerning disease prevention and health promotion.

Partnership strongly recommends that Congress modernize Medicare by directing the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to make coverage decisions for disease prevention and health promotion services based on evidence-based recommendations such as those of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. This was one of the principal policy recommendations in Partnership's 2003 report, *A Better Medicare for Healthier Seniors: Recommendations to Modernize Medicare's Prevention Policies*. We understand that you plan to introduce legislation that would bring about such a policy change.

When Congress created Medicare in 1965, it designed the program based on the knowledge of health, medicine and health care at that time. Thus, Medicare focused on hospitalization and visits to doctors' offices to treat or diagnose seniors who were already showing signs of illness. Medicine has made great progress since then, including development of proven ways to prevent disease and promote longer, healthier lives. But Medicare has consistently lagged behind the curve, failing to cover proven disease prevention and health promotion services or providing coverage years later than private insurers.

Allowing Medicare coverage decisions for preventive services to be made following a similar process as diagnosis and treatment decisions is an important step in modernizing Medicare. It is also critical that these coverage decisions be informed by systematic reviews of evidence conducted by independent experts, such as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. We understand that your bill would address these issues and enable Medicare to keep pace with progress in preventive medicine and health promotion.

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Partnership's *Better Medicare* report also noted that use rates for most preventive services that are covered by Medicare fall short of national targets, in part because of a confusing array of cost sharing requirements, such as deductibles and co-payments for these services. We understand that your bill would eliminate these impediments for preventive services covered in the future.

Most Americans understand that it is preferable to help people stay healthy instead of waiting to treat them after they become sick. It is in our nation's interest for seniors to be healthy instead of infirm, active instead of hospitalized, productive instead of costly, independent instead of dependent. Cost-saving and cost-effective disease prevention and health promotion are sound investments for our country.

Thank you again for requesting our comments on these important facets of Medicare policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Clymer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being particularly prominent.

John M. Clymer
President