

THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY

THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, 350 FIFTH AVENUE, SUITE 801, NEW YORK, NY 10118 TEL: (212) 308-1414 FAX: (212) 832-8646

LINDA HIDDEMEN BARONDESS
Executive Vice President

GERIATRIC AND CHRONIC CARE MANAGEMENT ACT

Congress must act now to ease the growing shortage of geriatricians and ensure that older Americans have access to geriatric care by passing S. 2593/H.R. 4689. Sponsored by Senators Blanche Lincoln and Harry Reid in the Senate and Rep. Gene Green in the House, the Geriatric and Chronic Care Management Act seeks to remove the barriers that prevent physicians from entering the field of geriatrics and improve care for millions of seniors suffering from multiple chronic conditions by expanding the Medicare benefit package to include coverage of geriatric assessment and care management. Seniors eligible for the benefit would be those beneficiaries with five chronic conditions or those with dementia and at least one chronic condition.

The U.S. health system is ill-prepared to handle the unique and often multiple health problems of our rapidly aging population. Today, there are fewer than 9,000 certified geriatricians in this country, far short of the 20,000 geriatricians needed to meet current demands. By the year 2030, when Americans 65 years and older represent one-fifth of the population, it is estimated that at least 36,000 geriatricians will be required.

Geriatricians are physicians who are first board certified in family practice or internal medicine and then complete additional fellowship training in geriatrics. By emphasizing care management and coordination, they provide comprehensive treatment to the frail elderly, those with complex medical conditions requiring special expertise, as well as promote wellness and preventive care for more active, functional seniors.

Explanation of Why Bill is Needed

Currently, 87 percent of Medicare beneficiaries have one or more chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, and 66 percent have multiple chronic conditions. The cost of managing these conditions is enormous. Seniors with five or more chronic conditions account for 20 percent of the Medicare population but 66 percent of Medicare spending. Poorly managed chronic conditions can lead to a range of other illnesses and complications and result in costly hospitalizations.

Despite the prevalence of seniors with chronic illnesses, the Medicare fee-for-service system is largely structured and financed to manage acute care episodes, not to manage and support the complex needs of beneficiaries with progressive chronic diseases. It does not pay for many of the services shown to be effective in managing chronic disease such as medication management, coordination with other providers to avoid duplication of tests, patient and family caregiver education, and referral to and coordination with community services.

While Medicare has recently undergone major reforms in the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act, including the addition of a large-scale disease management pilot program called the chronic care improvement program (CCIP), AGS believes this new program may not adequately address the needs of frail persons with multiple chronic conditions. This program authorizes a vendor-based approach to helping beneficiaries manage health through decision-support mechanisms and clinical databases to track beneficiary health.

Cosponsors of the Geriatric and Chronic Care Management Act

S. 2593 has a total of 13 cosponsors in the Senate, including the author of the legislation, Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas. They are: Harry Reid (D-NV), Bob Graham (D-FL), John Breaux (D-LA), John Kerry (D-MA), Susan Collins (R-ME), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Jack Reed (D-RI), Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), and Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

The House bill (H.R. 4689), introduced by Rep. Gene Green (D-TX), has 9 cosponsors. They are: Rep Eliot Engel, (NY-17), Rep. Martin Frost (TX-24), Rep Luis Gutierrez (IL-4), Rep Maurice Hinchey (NY-22), Rep Charley Rangel (NY-15), Rep. Elijah Cummings (MD-7), Rep. Donna Christensen (VI), Ed Pastor (D-AZ), and Lois Capps (D-CA).

Organizations Supporting the Geriatric and Chronic Care Management Act

Alliance for Aging Research
Alzheimer's Association
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American College of Nurse Practitioners
American College of Physicians
American Geriatrics Society
American Medical Directors Association
Catholic Health Association
International Longevity Center – USA
Mental Health and Aging Network of the American Society on Aging
National Association of Social Workers
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National PACE Association