



# Medicare Rights Center

April 11, 2007

Honorable Max Baucus  
Chairman  
Committee on Finance  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable John D. Rockefeller, IV  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health Care  
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Chuck Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Finance  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Orrin G. Hatch  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health Care  
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

The rising cost of health insurance and the increasing ranks of the uninsured are among the top domestic priorities for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The undersigned organizations work to ensure access to health care for people with disabilities, individuals who are extremely vulnerable to the loss of coverage under our current, fractured health care system. As Congress addresses America's health care crisis, we urge you to place a high priority on closing the gap in coverage that affects a group of Americans most in need of guaranteed access to health care—people with severe disabilities who are waiting to become eligible for Medicare coverage.

In 1972, Congress extended Medicare coverage to individuals determined by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to have a disability that prevents gainful employment. Since then, Medicare has provided access to health care for millions of people with disabilities, allowing them to access the health care they need to lead lives as healthfully as possible. In extending Medicare coverage, however, Congress mandated a two-year waiting period for Medicare coverage from the date of eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits.

Over the decades, the rising cost of private insurance coverage has put COBRA coverage out of reach for Americans living on Social Security Disability Insurance. In addition, many people who qualify for disability income become ineligible for Medicaid, especially with budget pressures forcing states to restrict eligibility criteria. The waiting period has forced people with severe disabilities to endure two years during which

treatment and care of their condition are put at risk. There are an estimated 1.5 million Americans with disabilities stuck in the waiting period for Medicare. Between one quarter and 40 percent of these individuals do not have health coverage.

The two-year Medicare waiting period affects more than those individuals who are now struggling to survive until their Medicare coverage begins. Every American is at risk of a severely disabling illness or accident. For individuals with progressive illnesses that all but guarantee that they will one day have to file for disability, this built-in gap in coverage is a virtual certainty.

We urge you to take action in this Congress to eliminate the two-year Medicare waiting period for people with disabilities. After being deemed disabled by SSA, Americans with disabilities should receive Medicare coverage as soon as they begin receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits.

ACCESS-DSPA Alliance  
Alzheimer's Association  
American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)  
American Council of the Blind  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association  
American Network of Community Options and Resources  
The Arc  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP)  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Brain Injury Association of America  
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.  
Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis  
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation  
Easter Seals  
Epilepsy Foundation  
Families USA

Lupus Foundation of America  
Medicare Rights Center  
Mental Health America  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Down Syndrome Society  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
National Respite Coalition  
NISH  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA)  
RESULTS  
Title II Community AIDS National Network (TIICANN)  
United Cerebral Palsy  
United Spinal Association

cc: Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader

U.S. Senate

Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

Honorable Charles B. Rangel  
Chairman  
House Committee on Ways and Means

Honorable Jim McCrery  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Ways and Means

Honorable Pete Stark  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health  
House Committee on Ways and Means

Honorable Dave Camp  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
House Committee on Ways and Means