



## **Sen. Wyden: On Introduction of the Better Care, Lower Cost Act**

Mr. President, I rise today to show my strong support for the Medicare program with the introduction of the Better Care, Lower Cost Act with my colleague, Senator Isakson.

The Medicare program, treasured by millions of Americans today, is now dominated by cancer, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic conditions. It is time for reform that offers seniors with chronic health challenges better quality, more affordable health care.

Fortunately, there are several pioneering health care leaders already paving the way to reform. The bipartisan legislation we are offering is designed to remove the government's shackles on innovation so that the types of successful approaches discussed by healthcare leaders here this morning become the norm rather than the exception.

The good news is that when the Senate Finance Committee recently approved legislation to fix Medicare's broken system of reimbursing doctors, the bill locked in specific incentives to move away from fee-for-service medicine. As part of its markup, the Senate Finance Committee added the foundation for improving chronic care for seniors: reforms that guarantee many more seniors access to individual care plans tailored to their unique needs.

The Better Care, Lower Cost Act builds on that progress and introduces a bold new concept in Medicare: the idea that chronic care should come first. Here are a few things the legislation does to promote this idea:

First, the legislation creates the "Better Care Program" allowing health practices to create "Better Care Practices" and health plans to become "Better Health Plans" that care for patients with teams led by nurses, doctors and physician assistants that must adhere to *the highest quality standards*. These innovators will receive one payment for their collective efforts to meet the chronic health needs of the seniors enrolled. This will give providers the flexibility to deliver the right care at the right time in the right place.

Second, because most seniors lack access to coordinated, chronic care services today, the legislation sets aside the limiting federal mandates – like the "attribution rule" – that prevent these teams from actively reaching out to the seniors who would benefit most from specialized chronic care. Our legislation also changes federal law so that participating practices and plans are able to reward seniors who participate in the Better Care Program by lowering their out-of-pocket costs when they work with their health care team.

Third, this bill recognizes that seniors with chronic conditions live all over the country, and sets out a plan for bringing providers and plans to every nook and cranny of America. And for those seniors and providers in rural or underserved areas, the legislation uses telemedicine and other technologies as resources to help to closely monitor and manage chronic conditions.

And finally, a word about the private sector: this bill recognizes the advances that have been made that prove that better care can be provided at lower cost. There should not be as many barriers when arriving at the gates of Medicare. In fact, in my hometown of Portland, Oregon, when seniors talk about their Medicare, they're really talking about plans like Kaiser and

Providence that are fully integrated. Seniors should have those care choices no matter where they live.

In Washington, there is talk a lot about “Medicare delivery system reform” without mentioning why it’s necessary or how it will actually help the people Medicare serves. The legislation Senator Isakson and I are introducing today is about giving seniors with chronic illnesses the focus and attention they need and deserve.

Every day Americans hear new statistics about the impact chronic illness has on families, productivity and the economy as a whole. But, I can’t recall a legislative effort where all those involved have remained singularly focused on solutions to this big problem.

To be clear, this legislation is not driven by a simple desire to cut costs. Anyone can save money by cutting benefits, but this legislation would actually *improve* the care that seniors receive. I urge my colleagues to join us in this effort by cosponsoring this important legislation.

I ask unanimous consent that a copy of the bill be printed in the Congressional Record.