

Medicare Coverage Of Chronic Conditions

Objective

Add a Medicare chronic care benefit and direct Medicare resources to chronic care to prevent the acute health crises and excess disability that are driving health care costs.

Status

The Alzheimer's Association has advocated for improved Medicare coverage for care of chronic conditions, and some members of Congress have focused on this issue. Findings from research and demonstrations point to effective ways to diagnose, manage, and treat Alzheimer's disease; maintain function; and prevent health care crises and excess disability. These findings place new responsibilities on clinicians to diagnose the disease earlier and begin management and treatment. However, Medicare does not pay clinicians for this type of care management and treatment.

Senator Blanche Lambert **Lincoln (AR)** and Representative Gene Green **(TX)** have introduced the *Geriatric Care Act of 2003* (HR 102/ S 387) with support by the Alzheimer's Association. A number of provisions in this bill would provide better coverage for people with Alzheimer's disease and other chronic conditions. The Geriatric Care Act of 2003 would improve access to geriatric care by extending Medicare coverage to geriatric assessment and care coordination.

The legislation authorizes Medicare to cover these essential services by paying geriatricians and others to manage medications effectively, work with other health care providers as a team, and provide necessary support for caregivers. The Geriatric Care Act would also help increase the number of residents in geriatric training programs, by allowing for additional geriatric training slots in hospitals. The bill also contains incentives to train academic geriatricians who teach geriatrics to primary care and specialty physicians-in-training.

Talking Points

The combination of dementia and other chronic conditions make Medicare costs skyrocket.

- 95% of Medicare beneficiaries with Alzheimer's disease have one or more other chronic conditions that are common in the elderly – coronary heart disease (30%), congestive heart failure (28%), diabetes (21%), and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (17%).

Medicare should provide coverage for geriatric assessment and chronic care management targeted to beneficiaries with Alzheimer's and other chronic conditions.

- Medicare Multiple chronic conditions can be effectively managed by: comprehensive assessment and management of individual needs, on-going monitoring of health status, early treatment of emerging problems, and close collaboration among the physician, the patient and family, and the community care system.
- Care coordination and management interventions have been proven to improve health status and reduce hospitalizations for people with Alzheimer's disease and in many instances, for the family caregiver.