



Connecticut Part D Coalition

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc., (the Center), is a private, non-profit organization located in Mansfield which provides education, advocacy, and legal assistance to help older people and people with disabilities obtain necessary healthcare. We represent Medicare beneficiaries throughout the state, respond to approximately 6,500 calls annually on our toll-free telephone line, host an informational website, provide the legal information, education, and support for Connecticut's CHOICES health insurance, counseling and assistance program, and provide a vast array of other services for Medicare beneficiaries throughout the state and in the national arena.

CONCERNS ABOUT MEDICARE PART D WRAP AND ConnPACE

I testify today as the executive director of the Center for Medicare Advocacy and on behalf of the Connecticut Part D Coalition. In 2005 the Center for Medicare Advocacy and other organizations concerned with health care rights and the rights of low-income, older adults, and disabled people formed the Part D Coalition to safeguard Connecticut's Medicaid and ConnPACE populations in light of the impending Medicare Part D program. As of January 1, 2006, all dually eligible people were required by federal law to begin getting their prescription drug coverage from Medicare rather than from Medicaid. In many states this was a good thing; but in Connecticut it meant that dually eligible people would receive less coverage and have

more cost-sharing responsibilities than before Part D and than those who were eligible for Medicaid, but not Medicare.

The Coalition was able to work with the Legislature to develop what has become known as the Part D “Wrap Around” in order to ensure that what Connecticut has long considered basic, necessary coverage for poor older and disabled people continued to be available when Medicare Part D became effective. We were able to show that this need could be met without great cost to the state – indeed with some savings, including to ConnPACE. For the last three years, after Part D’s rocky start, the Wrap Around has worked well. Indeed, the Department of Social Services has been reporting about the benefits to dually eligible people and the relative ease of administration.

Nonetheless, this year – when times are the toughest they have been in a long time – meaning that older and disabled people will be poorer, and more people will become eligible for Medicaid, the Governor proposes to end the Wrap Around, introduce co-payments for poor people in need of medications and health care, eliminate coverage for drugs not on a person’s Part D formulary, and limit ConnPACE enrollment and participation.

This is hardly the time to add these burdens to our most vulnerable older and disabled people. Studies show that the results will be that they go without necessary care. For example, a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that when older and disabled Medicare beneficiaries reached the “Donut Hole” gap in coverage under Part D – when they have no drug coverage – they took 14% fewer of their prescribed medications. Another Kaiser study of dually eligible people in three states found that those who lived in states with no, or limited Part D Wrap Around coverage, were often unable to access prescribed drugs and/or non-formulary

medications. Numerous other studies have shown that when co-payments are required of low-income people they forego necessary care. This is what will happen in Connecticut if the Governor's proposed cuts to Connecticut's Wrap Around and ConnPACE program are implemented.

We urge the Legislature, therefore, to reject the Budget proposals to undermine ConnPACE and eliminate the Part D Wrap Around. In particular we ask you to:

- Continue to cover drugs for ConnPACE participants and dually eligible older and disabled people that are not on their Part D formularies when the drugs *are* covered for other Medicaid recipients.
- Continue to cover Part D co-payments for dually eligible people and refuse to *add* co-payments to the Medicaid program.
- Safeguard ConnPACE. In particular, reject the Governor's proposal to limit the opportunity to enroll to one six-week period per year and to unduly restrict access by adding a terribly onerous asset test.
- Refuse to impose new prior authorization requirements for Medicaid-covered psychiatric and certain other, higher-cost, drugs.

CONCLUSION

For a long time Connecticut has recognized the need to provide basic medication and health care coverage for lower income people, older adults, and people with disabilities. We know the Legislature is faced with Draconian choices among competing interests for the State budget. We realize that the Capitol is overflowing with people urging that various cuts not be made.

The Center for Medicare Advocacy and the Connecticut Part D Coalition add their voices to those urging you to maintain the status quo for our most vulnerable citizens. Lower income older people and disabled people will forego necessary medications if the extreme cuts proposed by the Governor to the Part D Wrap Around and ConnPACE are accepted.

We urge you not to place this untenable burden on people who are already struggling. We urge you to maintain the status quo for dually eligible older and disabled people and ConnPACE participants. The undersigned organizations stand ready to help in anyway we can to make this a reality.

Respectfully submitted,

Connecticut Part D Coalition

*AARP Connecticut
Advocacy for Patients With Chronic Illness,
Inc.
Aids Life Campaign
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
Connecticut Aids Resource Coalition
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
Connecticut Association of Agencies on Aging
Connecticut Commission on Aging
Connecticut Community Care, Inc.*

*Connecticut Health Advocacy Forum
Connecticut Legal Rights Project
Connecticut Legal Services
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT
National Alliance on Mental Illness – CT
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Greater Connecticut &
Western Connecticut Chapters
New Haven Legal Assistance Association*



Judith A. Stein, Esq.
Executive Director
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
11 Ledgebrook Drive
Mansfield, CT 06250
(860)456-7790
jstein@medicareadvocacy.org
www.medicareadvocacy.org