

Key Facts Supporting Beneficiary Improvements

Compiled by Committee on Ways and Means

The CHAMP Act improves Medicare's preventive benefits: All Medicare beneficiaries deserve access to affordable preventive services, which improve health and reduce long-term costs. The CHAMP Act makes Medicare's preventive benefits more affordable by eliminating all co-payments and deductibles for these services. It also makes it easier for Medicare to add new preventive benefits. Under current law, Congress has to act to add any new preventive benefit to Medicare. Under the CHAMP Act, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is granted authority to add preventive benefits without Congressional action.

CHAMP provides for fair treatment of beneficiaries with mental illness: More than 25 percent of Americans over age 18 have a diagnosable mental disorder. Most of the more than 4.5 million people suffering from Alzheimer's disease are Medicare beneficiaries, and millions more suffer from depression and other disorders. For years, Medicare treated beneficiaries with mental illness as second-class citizens, forcing them to pay a 50% co-payment in the outpatient setting when all other outpatient services are subject to a 20% co-payment. The CHAMP Act eliminates this discrepancy by phasing down the 50% co-payment to 20% by 2012.

CHAMP helps low-income beneficiaries get needed assistance: Millions of low-income beneficiaries on limited fixed incomes struggle each month to pay for health care costs. Many of these beneficiaries would be eligible for the Medicare Savings Programs or the Part D Low-Income Subsidy but for the programs' stringent income and asset requirements. The CHAMP Act expands these vital programs to help beneficiaries afford out-of-pocket health care costs.

CHAMP adds new consumer protections to the Medicare Part D drug program: Many beneficiaries have trouble navigating the unnecessarily complex Part D drug program. The CHAMP Act makes improvements to the program that will ensure all beneficiaries' access to necessary drugs, reduce costs for certain beneficiaries, and enable low-income and adversely affected beneficiaries to change plans any time.

CHAMP improves access to important medications: Under current law, Part D plans are specifically prohibited from covering benzodiazepines, a class of drugs used to manage health conditions including anxiety disorders, seizures, and other medical conditions. The CHAMP Act allows Part D plans to cover these vital drugs and codifies current CMS guidance requiring coverage of drugs in the following six therapeutic classes: Anticonvulsants, Antidepressants, Antineoplastics, Antipsychotics, Antiretrovirals, and Immunosuppressants.

CHAMP reduces health disparities in Medicare: Medicare provides the same benefits for every beneficiary, but racial and ethnic disparities still exist in the program. For example, in 2004, two-thirds of whites 65 years and older received flu vaccines compared with just 45 percent of African-Americans and 55 percent of Hispanics. The CHAMP Act will reduce disparities by requiring CMS to collect and report new disparities data, improving outreach to limited English proficient populations, and improving support for previously uninsured beneficiaries entering the program.