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July 6, 2017

The Honorable Tim Walberg, Chairman
Subcommittee, Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions
United States House of Representatives
2436 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2207

A June 29, 2017 article by *ProPublica* reported the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) decided not to release, as was expected, at the annual research meeting of the AcademyHealth data collected on patients' diagnoses and services received since 2012 by the 19 million Americans with Medicare Advantage.

Since CMS already shares data on the 38 million patients in the traditional Medicare program, it is time for CMS to release the data it has collected on the highly taxpayer subsidized Medicare Advantage program.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions, the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN) urges you to call for a hearing on why the CMS has not released the data it has been collecting on Medicare Advantage and press for a date when it will be release. At the very least, the NRLN believes you should send letters to HHS Secretary Tom Price and CMS Administrator Seema Verma requesting an explanation on why the Medicare Advantage data has not been released and when will it be released.

Niall Brennan, until January the chief data officer for CMS, who worked on the data during his time in office, told *ProPublica* that it was "Hugely disappointing," that CMS, at the last minute, canceled the session where the data was to be unveiled.

Health economist Austin Frakt, who is affiliated with a number of academic institutions, told *ProPublica* he was disappointed by the decision to halt the data's release. He said he wants access to the data as a researcher and as a taxpayer. "We are paying an enormous amount of money to private insurance companies, but we know very little about what we're getting for that money," he said.

Frakt noted that researchers know “vastly more” about traditional Medicare because the data has been available for decades. “The claim is that private insurers are innovating in ways that traditional program is not. We need to validate that. We need to know what they’re doing for the benefit of everyone. We can’t do that without the data.”

The NRLN’s over-arching concern is that insurers get massive federal subsidies for offering Medicare Advantage plans and several studies have revealed that without subsidies Medicare Advantage plans really are not competitive with Medicare Part A and Part B. The subsidies are paid for with Medicare trust funds by the 70% who do not benefit from them and this makes all of Medicare appear to be even more expensive.

Sincerely,



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