



NRLN Review



NRLN Review, Summary for December 2021

The NRLN Review provides a monthly report on National Retiree Legislative Network actions, events in Congress and important retirement news.

NRLN Action Alert – Stop New Plan to Destroy Medicare

An NRLN Action Alert was issued on December 7 urging NRLN members to email letters to President Biden and their Representative and Senators to demand they kill a new plan to destroy Medicare.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) under President Biden's administration is moving ahead with Direct Contracting (DC), an ill-conceived plan announced, but not fully implemented by December 2020 under President Trump's administration.

The DC plan is **aimed at the 41 million in original Medicare** who would be auto-enrolled in a private plan. Furthermore, investor-backed startup so-called Direct Contracting Entities (DCEs) can be Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs), commercial insurers, and even Medicare Advantage (MA) new or existing MA plans. This could mean that **the 24.9 million enrollees in MA plans** might be converted to original Medicare to come under DCEs. More details later. The Health Affairs publication reported that already the pilot program includes 53 DCEs in 38 states and that 23 of them are investor owned. A second wave of new DCEs are expected to be announced in January 2022.

Click here to access this most important Action Alert. <https://www.nrln.org/action-alert/#/home/> Click here for more details about DC. <http://www.nrln.org/direct-contracting-medicare-under-attack/>

NRLN President's Letters to House Leaders

On December 7, NRLN President Bill Kadereit sent letters to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy urging them to exercise their leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives to avert the cuts to Medicare that are scheduled to take place on January 1, 2022.

While our nation continues to struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic, the House should pass legislation that would extend the moratorium on the 2% Medicare payment cuts caused by a federal budget sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011.

It is essential that America's seniors continue to have access to healthcare services from Medicare that are essential to their wellbeing.

The House passed a bill to extend the moratorium on the 2% Medicare sequester cuts until April 1, 2022, and reduce the cuts from 2% to 1% from April 1 through June 30, 2022. The Senate also voted to avert the cuts to Medicare.

AREF Research on Direct Contracting

The American Retirees Education Foundation is doing research in support of the NRLN's efforts to stop Direct Contracting from destroying Medicare.

AREF turned up a December 14, 2021, opinion piece in The Washington Post with the title: ***Trump had a scheme to privatize Medicare. The Biden administration isn't stopping it.***

At issue is a Trump administration-initiated program that many health-care reformers argue is essentially a backdoor attempt to further privatize Medicare. Almost no one realizes it's going on — except, that is, corporate interests and private equity investors, who are lined up like pigs at the trough to get their hands on taxpayer dollars. Click here to read op-ed.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/12/13/medicare-direct-contracting-privatization-health-care/>

AREF's scanning on Direct Contracting found a December 9, 2021, opinion piece in The Hill newspaper. The headline was: ***The biggest threat to Medicare you've never even heard of***

Millions of seniors are quietly being enrolled into a program run by third-party middlemen called Medicare Direct Contracting Entities (DCEs). This is occurring without their full knowledge or consent. Direct Contracting "should be stopped in its tracks by the Biden administration." Click here to read op-ed.

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/585103-the-biggest-threat-to-medicare-youve-never-even-heard-of>

AREF discovered a November 30, 2021, in-depth article on the *CommonDreams* website. It reported that a group of physicians would rally at HHS and present petitions opposing Direct Contracting. Click here to read the article. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2021/11/30/congress-asleep-switch-biden-continues-trump-era-ploy-privatize-medicare>

The AREF launched December 17 its annual appeal for donations to support its work. If you believe the example of AREF's work identified above and its work throughout 2021 is worthy of a tax-deductible donation from you, please click here. <https://www.seniorsaref.org/donations.html>

NRLN Legislative Committees' Work

The NRLN's Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC) composed of Judy Stenberg, Chairwoman, Deb Morrisett, Joe Mazzei, Al Duscher and Bob Martina submitted the following bills for the Legislative Action Planning Committee (LAPC) to consider for action during its November 1 conference call. The LAPC includes Bill Kadereit, Chairman, Judy Stenberg, Alyson Parker, Bob Martina and Ed Beltram. The LAPC's actions included:

H.R.2168, Expanded Telehealth Access Act would expand the list of the providers eligible for Medicare reimbursement for providing care via telehealth. The use of telehealth services during this crisis has demonstrated the critical role technology can play in improving health equity.

H.R.2759, Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act would encourage pharmacists to offer health care services such as health and wellness screenings, immunizations and diabetes management by authorizing Medicare payments for those services where pharmacists are already licensed under state law to provide them. Many states already allow pharmacists to provide these services but there currently is no way for pharmacists to receive Medicare reimbursement for providing them.

-- Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to Subcommittee on Health Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo (CA-18) and Ranking Member Brett Guthrie (KY-02) requesting votes in the Subcommittee on **H.R.2168** and **H.R.2759**.

S.1362, Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act would encourage pharmacists to offer healthcare services such as health and wellness screenings, immunizations and diabetes management by authorizing Medicare payments for those services where pharmacists are already licensed under state law to provide them. Many states already allow pharmacists to provide these services but there currently is no way for pharmacists to receive Medicare reimbursement for providing them.

S.3018 Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act of 2021, would improve care for seniors by streamlining and standardizing the way Medicare Advantage plans use prior authorization and increase oversight and transparency around prior authorization. Passage of **S.3018** would require Medicare Advantage plans to (1) establish an electronic prior authorization program that meets specified standards, including the ability to provide real-time decisions in response to requests for items and services that are routinely approved; (2) annually publish specified prior authorization information, including the percentage of requests approved and the average response time; and (3) meet other standards, as set by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, relating to the quality and timeliness of prior authorization determinations.

-- Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to Committee on Finance Chairman Ron Wyden (OR) and Ranking Member Michael Crapo (ID) requesting votes in Committee on **S.1362** and **S.3018**.

H.R.5388/S.2740, Promoting Readiness and Ensuring Proper API Reserves of Essential Medicines (PREPARE) ACT of 2021 would improve the resiliency of the U.S. pharmaceutical supply chain and fight shortages of essential drugs. Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) are essential ingredients in the manufacturing of any pharmaceutical product, including the generic drugs that make up 90 percent of all prescriptions filled in the United States. China is the world's largest producer of APIs. The U.S. dependence on China and other foreign suppliers for essential medicines and the ingredients to make those medicines is a national security risk.

-- Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone (NJ-06) and Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers requesting a vote in Committee on **H.R.5388**. Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairwoman Patty Murray (WA) and Ranking Member Richard Burr (NC) requesting a vote in Committee on **S.2740**.

H.R.5804, Expanding Access to Diabetes Self-Management Training Act of 2021, would expand Medicare coverage for diabetes self-management training (DSMT) sessions, where diabetes educators help train Medicare patients on how to manage their glucose, maintain a healthy weight, eat healthy foods, manage their insulin levels and improve general care for their diabetes. DSMT is associated with a reduction in risk for diabetes-related death and heart attack and is associated with improved self-care behavior and wellness, which can greatly reduce hospital care costs.

-- Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal (MA-01) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (TX-08) requesting a vote in Committee on **H.R.5804**. Also, letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone (NJ-06) and Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-05) requesting a vote in Committee on **H.R.5804**.

S.1435, Affordable Prescriptions for Patients Act of 2021 Would curb drug companies' anti-competitive use of patents to prevent generic and biosimilar competition from coming to market. This legislation specifically addresses an anti-competitive tactic known as "product hopping" and an abuse of the "patent dance" process for resolving patent infringement claims for biosimilars. Passage would pave the way for generics and biosimilars to compete with branded drugs, and aggressively lower drug prices for consumers in the process.

-- Letters were emailed on December 7, 2021, to Senate Committee on Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin (IL) and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (IA) requesting a vote in Committee on **S.1435**.

H.R.5723/S.3071, Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust and **H.R.5376, Build Back Better Act**. LRPC Chairman Bill Kadereit will schedule a conference call to discuss these two bills.

The LAC tabled and will monitor the following bills:

- H.R.19, Low Costs, More Cures Act of 2021
- H.R.5745, COVID-19 Access to Testing and Support for Immune Response Research Act of 2021
- H.R.1976, Medicare for All Act of 2021
- H.R.4148/S.2236, Expanding Health Care Options for Early Retirees Act
- H.R.5165, Improving Medicare Coverage Act
- S.1279, Medicare at 50 Act
- H.R.2168, Expanded Telehealth Access Act

All of the bills listed above have been posted on the NRLN website Bills webpage at: <https://www.nrln.org/legislative-action-network/#/bills> . The Bills webpage feeds the NRLN Report Card on all members of Congress.

The NRLN webmaster has post all of the letters in Letters to Washington in the NRLN website Archives at: <https://www.nrln.org/letters-to-washington-2/>

Key News Articles Posted in November

During December, 61 links to news articles related to retirement issues were researched and posted daily IN THE NEWS on the NRLN website home page. The headlines below are links to the articles. Or, read the articles at www.nrln.org under IN THE NEWS in the right column. Scroll down the right column and click on the headline to access the article you want to read. Below are some of the headlines.

[Biden points to drug prices in call for Senate social spending vote](#) ~ Dec 06

[Opinion: It shouldn't be this hard to grow old in America](#) ~ Dec 07

[Biden Focuses On Drug Pricing Measures In Push For Spending Bill Vote](#) ~ Dec 07

['The time for procrastination is over.' How one Democratic lawmaker wants to fix Social Security](#) ~ Dec 07

[Opinion: Price controls on drugs would save lives, but also take them](#) ~ Dec 09

[House Democrats find drug companies 'unjustified' in price hikes](#) ~ Dec 10

[Telehealth Became a Lifeline for Older Americans. But It Still Has Glitches.](#) ~ Dec 11

[More Americans see inflation as the biggest risk to their retirement plans](#) ~ Dec 13

[Opinion: Trump had a scheme to privatize Medicare. The Biden administration isn't stopping it.](#) ~ Dec 14

['Breaking Point': Medical Costs Drive More Americans To Push Off Care](#) ~ Dec 14

[Opinion: Biden vowed to raise taxes only for the rich — but inflation for the elderly is the cruelest tax of all](#) ~ Dec 14

[Medicare Privatization Scheme Faced Legal Questions About Profiteering](#) ~ Dec 14

[Many Seniors on Medicare Falling Into Medical Debt](#) ~ Dec 15

[Biden Acknowledges Social Spending Bill Will Slip To 2022](#) ~ Dec 17

[FDA gives 1st emergency approval to antiviral pill to treat COVID-19 patients](#) ~ Dec 22

[US adds Merck pill as 2nd easy-to-use drug against COVID-19](#) ~ Dec 23

[WH: GlaxoSmithKline's Monoclonal Antibody Treatment Is the Only One Effective Against Omicron Variant](#) ~ Dec 23

[AT&T Slashed Promised Life Insurance for Former Workers—and Time Runs Out at Year-End](#) ~ Dec 26

[A Disastrous Year In Federal Healthcare Spending](#) ~ Dec 27, 2021

[Microsoft Has Become One Of The Most Powerful Forces In Healthcare, With No Signs Of Slowing Down](#) ~ Dec 30, 2021