

# ***Medicare Allows More Benefits for Chronically Ill, Aiming to Improve Care for Millions***

Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon and an architect of the Chronic Care Act, which was included in budget legislation signed recently by President Trump. Credit Joshua Roberts/Reuters

**By Robert Pear**

- June 24, 2018
- 
- 

WASHINGTON — Congress and the Trump administration are revamping Medicare to provide extra benefits to people with multiple chronic illnesses, a significant departure from the program’s traditional focus that aims to create a new model of care for millions of older Americans.

The changes — reflected in a new law and in official guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services — tackle a vexing and costly problem in American health care: how to deal with long-term illnesses that can build on one another, and the social factors outside the reach of traditional medicine that can contribute to them, like nutrition, transportation and housing.

To that end, the additional benefits can include social and medical services, home improvements like wheelchair ramps, transportation to doctor’s offices and home delivery of hot meals.

The new law is a rare instance of bipartisan cooperation on a major policy initiative, embraced by members of Congress from both parties. The changes are also supported by Medicare officials and insurance companies that operate the fast-growing Medicare Advantage plans serving one-third of the 60 million Medicare beneficiaries.

ADVERTISEMENT

“This is a way to update and strengthen Medicare,” said Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon and an architect of the law, the Chronic Care Act, which was included in budget legislation signed recently by President Trump. “It begins a transformational change in the way Medicare works for seniors who

suffer from chronic conditions. More of them will be able to receive care at home, so they can stay independent and out of the hospital.”

Half of Medicare patients are treated for five or more chronic conditions each year, and they account for three-fourths of Medicare spending, according to Kenneth E. Thorpe, the chairman of the health policy department at Emory University.

Under the new law and Trump administration policy, most of the new benefits will be reserved for Medicare Advantage plans, which will be able to offer additional benefits tailored to the needs of people with conditions like diabetes, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, heart failure, rheumatoid arthritis and some types of cancer.

“This is a big win for patients,” said Seema Verma, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Officials hope that combining social and medical services will produce better outcomes for patients and save money for Medicare.