



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2011

Contact: Scott Mulhauser/Erin Shields  
(202) 224-4515

**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)**  
**One Year after the Enactment of Health Care Reform**  
*As prepared for delivery*

Abraham Lincoln said:

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”

Health reform looked ahead to the responsibility of tomorrow. It asked: will quality, affordable care remain accessible if costs continue to rise? Health reform took responsibility for tomorrow by solving the challenges of today. It protected one of our most important responsibilities: Medicare.

One year ago, Medicare was set to go bankrupt in just seven years. Health care reform extended the life of the program by twelve years after that, until at least 2029.

A year ago, Medicare only paid health care professionals to provide care when seniors were sick. Medicare was too often a system that only treated sickness, and that meant it was costly. We knew these costs were overburdening Medicare and our entire health care system.

We spent nearly two years studying the problems. We worked together to craft a law that lowered costs and shifted the focus of our system to prevention and wellness.

Today, Medicare doesn't just care for you when you get sick. It is a true health care system.

Under the health reform law, seniors receive an annual wellness visit. Seniors can schedule the visit even if they aren't sick. They can receive screenings and tips on how to manage or prevent conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure. Madame Secretary, I look forward to hearing from you today about how these visits are working for seniors.

A year ago, seniors faced a Medicare program that focused on the quantity of care they received, not the quality of the care delivered. Medicare paid hospitals more if a patient got an infection that could have been avoided and paid hospitals less if they successfully avoided infections.

A year ago, each of a patient's doctors would perform the same test, because they hadn't been encouraged to work together and share results.

Health reform increases payments to hospitals for providing higher quality care, the law gives hospitals incentives to prevent avoidable illnesses, and the law improves quality by increasing the number of primary care physicians.

These doctors can better keep track of patient care. They can make sure patients are seeing the right specialist. And they can help specialists avoid repeating tests, procedures and options that have already been completed or considered.

To encourage primary care, the Affordable Care Act pays doctors more to practice primary care. That's already producing results.

Dr. Tom Roberts has been an internist in Missoula, Montana, for 30 years.

He said health reform has "already had a direct impact on our ability to provide good medical care to the citizens of Missoula and the surrounding counties," and he added that, "We are in a much better position to continue to support the kind of primary care services that are vitally important moving forward."

A year ago, seniors had to pay more for their prescription drugs, and that meant seniors didn't always get the treatment they needed. The Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit covered the first \$2,800 in costs, and catastrophic coverage kicked in after seniors spent \$6,300, but there was a coverage gap in between, often called the "donut hole."

Today, health reform is closing that gap in coverage. Already, more than 3.5 million seniors received a check for \$250 that helped cover the cost of their prescriptions in 2010. This year, seniors who hit the donut hole will receive a discount of 50 percent off the cost of their prescriptions, and the gap will be eliminated entirely by 2020.

A year ago, the standards to prevent waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare were not tough enough. As a result, criminals were able to rip off federal health care programs. Too often, these programs paid fraudulent claims without enough review.

The new health reform law provides enforcement officials with unprecedented new tools. These tools prevent fraud before it occurs.

Because of the changes in the Affordable Care Act, Medicare is stronger than ever. But now we face new challenges. We face those who want to roll back these benefits and weaken Medicare.

So let us continue to confront the challenges of tomorrow, and let us continue to protect and strengthen Medicare today.

###