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BAUCUS TOUTS SUCCESS OF NEW MEDICARE PREVENTION BENEFITS AS NEW DATA SHOWS SENIORS ARE BENEFITING

Finance Chairman Holds Hearing on Implementation of Health Reform Benefits

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today hailed the success of Medicare’s new preventive benefits enacted in the health reform law. At a hearing to provide an update on the implementation of the law after nearly a year of enactment, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius told Baucus and the Committee that 152,000 seniors received the new Medicare annual wellness visit in just its first eight weeks of availability. The Affordable Care Act created the annual wellness visit, one of many new preventive efforts, so seniors could see their physician to receive free tests and screenings and discuss prevention and chronic condition management strategies that keep seniors well.

“Because of health care reform, more than 150,000 seniors received this preventive Medicare benefit in just the first eight weeks of availability,” said Baucus. **“Clearly, seniors recognize that a visit to the doctor for free preventive tests, screenings and tips on how to better manage, or even avoid, chronic conditions helps them maintain healthy lives. This focus on prevention not only leads to better health outcomes, it also allows seniors – and their doctors – to catch conditions before they become serious and costly, which saves Medicare dollars.”**

During the hearing Baucus asked Sebelius for an update on the implementation of all of the new benefits created in the law. In particular, he discussed the benefits that strengthen Medicare, including the annual wellness visit, discounts for seniors purchasing prescription drugs and new tools to prevent waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare.

Baucus also highlighted efforts in the law to move Medicare from a system that pays for health care based on the quantity of care to one based on the quality of care patients receive. He stressed that a new focus on prevention, including the annual wellness visit, will improve patient outcomes and save Medicare dollars. Baucus stressed the importance of the law’s work to incentivize hospitals to prevent costly avoidable conditions and to intensify coordination among specialists by increasing the number of doctors practicing primary care. Primary care doctors have been shown to better focus on prevention and help all of a patient’s specialists reduce repeated care and coordinate more effectively.

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