

July 20, 2021

Members of the U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of Congress,

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the flaws in our nation's healthcare system. The burden of these failures has fallen squarely on millions of working people across the country. The American labor movement has fought for more than a century to make quality health care a basic right in the United States. On behalf of our collective membership, we urge you to take action in the American Families Plan package to improve healthcare for millions of Americans by improving and expanding the Medicare program. Specifically, we urge you to include the following priorities in the coming budget reconciliation package:

- Comprehensive and robust Medicare drug price negotiation to lower drug prices for the Medicare program, with negotiated prices applying to all health plans. We urge that this policy apply to as many prescription drugs as possible to improve the lives of as many patients as possible.
- Improving Medicare by expanding its benefits to include dental, vision, and hearing services, and capping out of pocket costs.
- Lowering the Medicare eligibility age to 60, to guarantee healthcare to millions of more Americans who are approaching retirement.

The United States pays significantly more for pharmaceuticals than any other country, and the Medicare program is the largest purchaser of prescription drugs in the world. High drug prices have been driven by price gouging and monopoly pricing from pharmaceutical corporations, and patients across the country have been unable to afford the medications they need. As a result, millions of patients are forced to forego prescriptions or ration their treatment, leading to preventable illness, injury, and death. By allowing Medicare to negotiate the prices of prescription drugs and implementing other protections against high drug prices, millions of workers and patients will be able to get the treatments they need without financial strain. Further, drug price negotiation will generate hundreds of millions of dollars in savings for the Medicare program. We urge you to require the federal government to negotiate lower drug prices for Medicare and all health plans, including lowering prices for newly launched drugs, as well as capping increases in drug prices to the rate of inflation for all payers (including group health plans as well as Medicare).

The savings from Medicare negotiations should then be used to expand and improve Medicare by including vision, dental, and hearing benefits as well as establishing a \$2,000 out-of-pocket maximum in Part D for all beneficiaries. Today, over 70 percent of seniors have no dental insurance, and the more than 70 percent of older Americans who could benefit from a hearing aid do not have one—too often because hearing aids are simply too expensive. Further, older Americans are living off limited income, and without an out-of-pocket cap in Medicare, they are at risk of financial hardship due to unexpected health care expenses. It is far past time to improve health care and quality of life for America’s seniors and people with disabilities. Reinvesting in the Medicare program to expand its benefits would improve health care for millions of our seniors.

People approaching retirement age are in desperate need of guaranteed health care. Twenty-seven percent of adults aged 50 to 64 are not confident that they can afford health insurance over the next year, and more than a quarter report issues with navigating health insurance options, coverage decisions, and how their choices will affect their out-of-pocket costs. During the pandemic, millions of workers in this age group lost their jobs and their employer-sponsored health insurance, while the risk of serious health concerns increase at this age. Lowering the Medicare eligibility age to 60 will improve the health and wellbeing of millions of Americans.

We have a critical opportunity to improve and expand Medicare in the American Families Plan, to deliver meaningful action on health care for working people across the country.

Sincerely,

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

American Postal Workers Union (APWU)

Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers’ International Union (BCTGM)

Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED-IBT)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT)

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)

National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)

National Nurses United (NNU)

Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)

Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)

United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)

United Steelworkers (USW)

Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)