



Expand Kidney-Related Research and Improve Care for People with Kidney Disease

It is estimated that more than 37 million Americans suffer from chronic kidney disease, including 400,000 individuals who are undergoing treatment for end-stage renal disease (ESRD), or kidney failure. Most commonly caused by diabetes or high blood pressure, kidney failure is expected to claim more than 2 million lives by 2030. Without dialysis or a kidney transplant, patients suffering from kidney failure will not survive. Since transplant organs are in short supply, most patients must undergo dialysis treatment, a process that substitutes for healthy kidneys by mechanically filtering body wastes and excess fluids from the bloodstream, provided three or more times per week, but does not provide the physiologic equivalent of the native kidneys.

The Chronic Kidney Disease Improvement in Research and Treatment Act (S. 1676, H.R. 3912). supports improvements in the research, treatment and care for all people with chronic kidney disease, including those on dialysis, through the following provisions.

Expand Research in Kidney Disease by (1) requiring HHS to issue a report identifying barriers or payment disincentives for kidney transplantation and best practices for improving organ donation rates; (2) requiring the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate the ESRD payment system to identify barriers to adopting innovative technologies and make recommendations to eliminate the barriers; and (3) requiring the Secretary of DHHS to conduct a study to better understand the progression of kidney disease and treatment of kidney failure in minority populations.

Empower Patient Decision Making and Choice by (1) increasing access to the Medicare kidney disease education (KDE) benefit; and (2) guaranteeing access to Medigap policies to all ESRD Medicare beneficiaries, regardless of age, as current Medigap coverage is guaranteed only for Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and over and is not available in every state to those 64 and younger.

Improve Patient Care and Ensure Quality Outcomes by (1) implementing a series of technical changes to better align the payment rates with the cost of providing care through the ESRD Prospective Payment System (PPS); (2) improving patient decision making and transparency by consolidating and modernizing quality programs; and (3) clarifying that nephrologists and non-physician practitioners providing renal dialysis services in underserved rural and/or urban areas may participate in the National Health Service Corps loan forgiveness program.

Recommendation:

To improve the quality of life for kidney disease patients and the efficiency of Medicare spending, Congress should enact S. 1676/H.R. 3912, The Chronic Kidney Disease Improvement in Research and Treatment Act.

The Renal Physicians Association (RPA) is the professional organization of nephrologists whose goal is to ensure quality care under the highest standards of medical practice for patients with kidney disease and related disorders. For further information, please contact Robert Blaser, RPA's Director of Public Policy, at 301-468-3515 or rblaser@renalmd.org