Legislative Brief

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

Recommendation: RPA urges Congress to enact The Chronic Kidney Disease Improvement in Research and Treatment Act, legislation designed to expand kidney related education and promote the delivery of high-quality care for people with kidney disease.

It is estimated that more than 20 million Americans suffer from chronic kidney disease (CKD), including 400,000 individuals with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) or kidney failure, who must undergo kidney replacement therapy, known as dialysis, to sustain life. 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 undergo dialysis which mechanically filters body wastes and excess fluids from the bloodstream three to four times per week but does not provide the physiologic equivalent of the native kidneys.

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

Expand Kidney Disease Awareness and Education by (1) expanding the Medicare annual wellness benefit to include kidney disease screening; and (2) increasing access to the Medicare kidney disease education (KDE) benefit by expanding the list of allowed providers and providing access to these services to Medicare beneficiaries with Stage 5 CKD not yet on dialysis.

Create an Economically Stable Dialysis Infrastructure and Incentivize Innovation by (1) requiring the Secretary of HHS to adjust the ESRD payment rate when the current rate would not cover the cost of adding a new drug, biologic, device, or other technology into the bundle after the transitional payment period ends; and (2) establishing an ESRD-specific productivity rate.

Increase Patient Access to Quality Performance Information by Improving the Accuracy and Transparency of ESRD Quality Programs by (1) reforming how CMS adopts measures used in the ESRD Quality Incentive Program (QIP) to ensure use of meaningful, valid, and reliable measures; (2) establishing QIP bonus payments for facilities exceeding the attainment of performance standards; and (3) eliminating contradictions between the ESRD QIP and Five Star programs.

Expand Patient Choice of Coverage by (1) providing access to Medigap coverage for all ESRD beneficiaries regardless of age; and (2) requiring HHS to reinstate dialysis services as one of the areas subject to the Network Adequacy requirements.

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