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SENATORS INTRODUCE BILL TO IMPROVE MEDICARE DRUG BENEFIT ACCESS AND TO HELP PHARMACIES BETTER SERVE BENEFICIARIES

Bill addresses problems facing pharmacies and beneficiaries under the Medicare drug benefit

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Republican Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) today introduced legislation to ensure greater access to pharmacies for Medicare beneficiaries and to strengthen Medicare drug benefit policies for America’s pharmacists. The Pharmacy Access Improvement (PhAIm) Act of 2007 will require drug plans to reimburse pharmacies more quickly, strengthen standards for beneficiary access to pharmacies, and require the establishment of information hotlines for pharmacists and physicians. The bill will also restrict the practice of “co-branding” that can lead some Medicare beneficiaries to incorrectly believe that they can receive their medicines from only certain pharmacies.

“America’s pharmacies are a lifeline to millions of Medicare beneficiaries, and we have a responsibility to get them the resources they need,” said Baucus. **“This bill will deliver financial security to our pharmacies and make it easier for them to serve Medicare beneficiaries. The Pharmacy Access Improvement Act will support pharmacies, and help the Medicare drug benefit work better for America’s seniors.”**

“This legislation works to make the Medicare prescription drug program more user-friendly for pharmacists, so they can better serve the seniors who rely on them,” Grassley said. **“For beneficiaries, it will increase access to pharmacies. For pharmacists, it will ensure that they are reimbursed on time, that they know the drug prices in the contracts they sign, that toll-free pharmacist help lines are established at both CMS and the prescription drug plans, and that pharmacies wanting to participate in prescription drug plans are able to do so.”**

To improve Medicare beneficiaries’ access to the medicines they need, the PhAIm Act requires plans to use only pharmacies that are open to all members of the public in order to meet their coverage requirements. The bill will also make it easier for pharmacies that serve a disproportionate number of low income patients to join drug plan networks. The legislation also restricts pharmacy “co-branding” by prohibiting cards issued by private plans from bearing the name or logo of any pharmacy.

Senators Baucus and Grassley are joined by Senators Lincoln (D-Ark.), Roberts (R-Kans.), Conrad (D- N.D.), Enzi (R-Wyo.), Schumer (D-N.Y.), Cochran (R-Miss.), Salazar (D-Colo.), Smith (R-Ore.), Bingaman (D-N.M.) and Snowe (R-Maine) in sponsoring this legislation. Senator Baucus, along with Senator Lincoln and Senator Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), introduced similar legislation in 2006.

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