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[Health Coalition Calls on Congress to Pass Medicare Package](#)

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A new coalition of 50 health care groups is urging Congress to restore funding for expired Medicare programs and address other priorities affecting patients as soon as possible.

In a letter sent to congressional leaders Friday, which was provided exclusively to CQ, the coalition called on lawmakers to pass a Medicare package ideally in the next continuing resolution currently being negotiated. The current CR runs through Feb. 8.

“Now that we are well into 2018, Congress’ inaction on these important Medicare policies could mean real harm to the vulnerable patients we serve,” the groups wrote.

Medicare patients and providers have become increasingly concerned by continued congressional gridlock with lawmakers putting off action on so-called “Medicare extenders” as they focused on keeping the government open.

Expired Medicare programs in need of renewal include an exception to an annual cap on physical, occupational and speech language therapies that allows patients to avoid having to pay for expensive treatments out of their own pockets. Advocates warn patients are already beginning to hit that cap and some won’t be able to afford continued treatment for strokes, brain trauma and other serious medical conditions.

Also at play is funding for rural hospitals that see large numbers of Medicare patients and an extension of special needs plans for people with severe chronic illnesses, among other programs.

The coalition is also pushing for passage of two other Medicare-related measures. One ([HR 3178](#)) aims to improve the delivery of home infusion therapy and dialysis for Medicare patients,

among other goals. Another ([S 870](#)) would change Medicare payment policies with the goal of improving care for people with multiple chronic conditions, including expanding the use of telehealth services.

“It’s time to get this done,” said Kendall Van Pool, a spokesman for the coalition. “There are a lot of good things in these bills that, frankly, everyone is happy with on the Hill.”

The question is whether leadership is ready to include these in a package, Van Pool said.

Both the House and Senate have pushed forward bipartisan bills to address the Medicare issues, but they have not yet been included in a funding package.

Funding for community health centers and the Children’s Health Insurance Program has also factored heavily into recent continuing resolution discussions. While Congress included a six-year renewal of CHIP in the last CR ([PL 115-120](#)), it has yet to address health center funding.

The coalition includes groups such as the Alzheimer’s Association, American Heart Association, Medicare Rights Center, Caregiver Action Network, National Coalition on Health Care and National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, among others.

“It is only through action by congressional leadership that these bipartisan, and often bicameral policies, can be finalized,” they wrote.

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