June 4, 2014

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  The Honorable Marilyn Tavenner
Secretary           Administrator
Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW 200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201        Washington, DC 20201

Dear Madam Secretary and Administrator Tavenner:

The undersigned members of Congress are writing to urge expeditious completion of a Medicare National Coverage Determination (NCD) for low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) scans in patients at high-risk of developing lung cancer. We feel strongly that Medicare patients should have access to evidence-based, appropriate medical imaging procedures and respectfully request that you provide Congress with written correspondence updating the status of the NCD process as it moves forward.

Since lung cancer is often first identified in an advanced stage, only about 15 percent of lung cancer patients live five years or more following an initial diagnosis of the disease. More than 156,000 patients die from lung cancer each year in the United States which is greater than the mortality rates of breast, prostate, and colon cancer combined.

Thankfully, advances in science and technology are making early lung cancer screening more effective, giving patients a greater chance at survival. Providing patients at high-risk of developing lung cancer with annual low-dose CT scans has enabled radiologists and thoracic surgeons to accurately diagnose and treat early stage lung cancer and, subsequently, save more lives. For example, the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST), a randomized control trial of more than 53,000 high-risk patients between the ages of 55 and 74 showed that individuals receiving annual CT scans had a 20 percent lower lung cancer mortality rate in comparison to those patients screened using standard radiography. Preliminary data from the NLST also demonstrate that annual low-dose CT scans are more cost effective than other accepted cancer screening interventions, including breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screenings.

In December 2013 the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended asymptomatic patients between the ages 55 and 80 who are current smokers with at least 30 pack years of smoking history or former smokers who ceased tobacco use within the last 15 years receive annual low-dose CT scans.

While private insurance is mandated to cover the USPSTF recommendations for preventative services, the same mandate does not apply to Medicare. As such, it is unknown whether patients 65 and older will have equal access to this same benefit. Following the Task Force’s revised higher grade on CT Lung Cancer Screening, Medicare initiated an NCD process to assess whether they too will fully cover LDCT as an annual screening exam in high risk
patients. Under the NCD process, Medicare will solicit stakeholder feedback, review published scientific evidence on the issue, convene a formal Medicare Evidence Development and Coverage Advisory Committee (MEDCAC) hearing on April 30, 2014, and then make a preliminary final decision around November 2014. CMS is required to issue a final decision regarding low-dose CT lung cancer screening by February 8, 2015, however, it can take several (6+) months to place instructions to Medicare contractors before patients 65 and older actually start being able to receive the procedure.

The undersigned members of Congress request regular written updates to ensure that the NCD process moves expeditiously. Americans pay into Medicare throughout their working lives and deserve to have access to potentially life-saving evidence-based screenings that can prevent further health costs down the road. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jim Renacci  
Member of Congress

John Barrow  
Member of Congress

Charles Boustany  
Member of Congress

Richard Neal  
Member of Congress

Jim Sensenbrenner  
Member of Congress

Mike Simpson  
Member of Congress

Matt Cartwright  
Member of Congress

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Henry Cuellar  
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Frank Wolf  
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John Carney  
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Todd Young  
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Tim Ryan  
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Betty McCollum  
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Tim Griffin  
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Member of Congress
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