

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 20, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

We are encouraged by your recent announcement to increase access to at-home COVID-19 tests at no cost for millions of Americans and appreciate your department's existing efforts that cover diagnostic testing for original Medicare beneficiaries. These are critical steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save millions of lives. We urge the Department of Health and Human Services to make these efforts more holistic by fully covering no-cost, at-home tests for the 61.5 million Americans enrolled in Medicare.¹

As of January 15, 2022, insurance companies and group health plans are required to cover over-the-counter COVID-19 diagnostic tests that have been authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.² Individuals will be able to receive eight over-the-counter at-home tests per month at no cost from their local pharmacy or purchase them online and get reimbursed through their insurer.

Currently Medicare does not pay for at-home COVID-19 tests. Medicare beneficiaries are currently able to obtain a diagnostic test, whether a PCR or antigen test, but they first need an order from a health care professional and the test must be performed by a laboratory – creating additional access barriers for older people and people with disabilities who have traditional Medicare, especially those who are homebound or live in rural and suburban communities.³ Outside of an authorization, they can only access one lab-performed test per year.

In order to protect people with Medicare from the ongoing COVID-19 variants, we urge the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have sustained access to at-home COVID-19 testing at no cost through the Medicare program. We encourage the Department to consider options such as additional clinics in rural, suburban, and other underserved areas with less accessible existing testing options, a telephone hotline to order free at-home tests to complement the website the administration created, and support for locally led efforts to provide at-home testing to Medicare beneficiaries at no cost.

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). (2021). *2021 Edition: Medicare Beneficiaries At A Glance*. https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Beneficiary-Snapshot/Downloads/Bene_Snapshot.pdf

² CMS. (January 2022). *Biden-Harris Administration Requires Insurance Companies and Group Health Plans to Cover the Cost of At-Home COVID-19 Tests, Increasing Access to Free Tests*. <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/biden-harris-administration-requires-insurance-companies-and-group-health-plans-cover-cost-home>

³ CMS. (January 2022). *How to get your At-Home Over-The-Counter COVID-19 Test for Free*. <https://www.cms.gov/how-to-get-your-at-home-OTC-COVID-19-test-for-free>

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Thank you again for your efforts, and we look forward to working together to ensure older people have the tools at their disposal to mitigate the spread and infection of COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Chris Pappas
Pramila Jayapal
Madeleine Dean
Ritchie Torres
Susan Wild
James A Himes
André Carson
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Brian Fitzpatrick
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