

# Priorities for Health Care Reform

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Health care reform was my topic during a recent trip to Washington, D.C. to testify to the Senate Finance Subcommittee about our issues battling the health care system. Speaking on behalf of the millions of Americans who belong to AARP, we discussed that any health care reform bill must address the following six priorities:

1. Guaranteeing access to affordable coverage for Americans age 50 – 64; The Medicare Early Access Act of 2009 (S 960) would allow Americans my age to buy into Medicare for assistance. You need all the help you can get when you live with a severe chronic illness.
2. Closing the Medicare Part D coverage gap or “doughnut hole”; My husband fell into the hole and could not climb out until he spent another \$3,500.00 out of pocket.
3. Creating access to generic versions of biologic drugs used to treat cancer, multiple sclerosis, anemia and rheumatoid arthritis. I’ve injected a biologic drug for 15 years and have seen the cost rise from approximately \$978 per month to well over \$5,000 per month!
4. Preventing costly hospital readmissions by creating a follow-up care benefit in Medicare to help people safely transition home after a hospital stay. My husband suffered a major set back when released too early from the hospital. He fell, tore out a feeding tube system and had to be rushed back to the hospital, only to spend another two weeks trying to heal.
5. Federal funding and eligibility for home and community based services through Medicaid so older Americans can remain in their homes and avoid more costly institutions as they age; and
6. Improving programs that help keep low income Americans in Medicare afford the health care and prescriptions drugs they need to stay alive.

The Pre-existing Condition Patient Protection Act (H.R.1558) would prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage to an individual with pre-existing conditions. We probably would have been able to find less costly insurance coverage if this Act had been in place 15 years ago!

The programs must be reformed and I sincerely believe all Americans should be able to find something in a new system they can support. Now is not the time to be negative but to be positive that perhaps, finally, there will be reform to our very ill health care system.

My testimony was made to each of our Senators and Congressman Grayson. All live testimony was suspended due to a very well coordinated hearing protest. The testimony was entered into public record. I am most happy to continue to serve as an advocate for health care reform.