

NKF endorses H.R.2644 - Chronic Kidney Disease Improvement in Research and Treatment Act of 2017

The National Kidney Foundation is pleased to endorse H.R. 2644, introduced by Representatives Tom Marino (R-PA), John Lewis (D-GA) and Peter Roskam (R-IL). The legislation would benefit chronic kidney disease (CKD) patients by expanding access to health insurance options, creating greater opportunities for research and innovation, increasing access to various treatment options, and improving patient care and quality outcomes. With an estimated 30 million CKD patients nationwide including 636,000 with end stage kidney failure, a renewed focus on CKD is warranted. Key provisions of H.R. 2644 include:

Current law guarantees access to supplemental health insurance plans (“Medigap”) to Medicare beneficiaries age 65 or over. This guarantee does not extend to individuals with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) under age 65 except in 28 states. H.R. 2644 would make Medigap available to all ESRD patients regardless of age. When patients do not have access to supplemental insurance, they must pay high coinsurance on top of premiums and deductibles. The coinsurance for dialysis alone can total nearly \$8,000 per year.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) would be required to report to Congress on disincentives in the Medicare payment system that create barriers to kidney transplantation and follow-up care, and requires the Secretary to examine opportunities to increase living and deceased organ donation rates. The Secretary also would be required to report to Congress efforts to slow the progression of CKD and treatment patterns in minority populations that are disproportionately impacted by kidney disease and failure. The bill also requires the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate the Medicare ESRD payment system and its potential barriers to the utilization of innovative services and therapies. H.R. 2644 improves access in underserved rural or urban areas by clarifying that nephrology professionals in these geographic areas may participate in the National Health Service Corp loan forgiveness program.

Patient empowerment provisions in H.R. 2644 include permanent reauthorization of Medicare Advantage Chronic Special Needs Plans for ESRD beneficiaries (C-SNPs) and expanded access to telemedicine (health care via telecommunications) for home dialysis patients by allowing the dialysis facility or the home to be approved sites for telemedicine. The legislation improves access to the Medicare Kidney Disease Education Program by expanding the types of professionals who could provide the benefit and allowing CKD Stage 5 patients who are not yet on dialysis to utilize the benefit (under current law only Stage 4 kidney patients qualify for the program).