

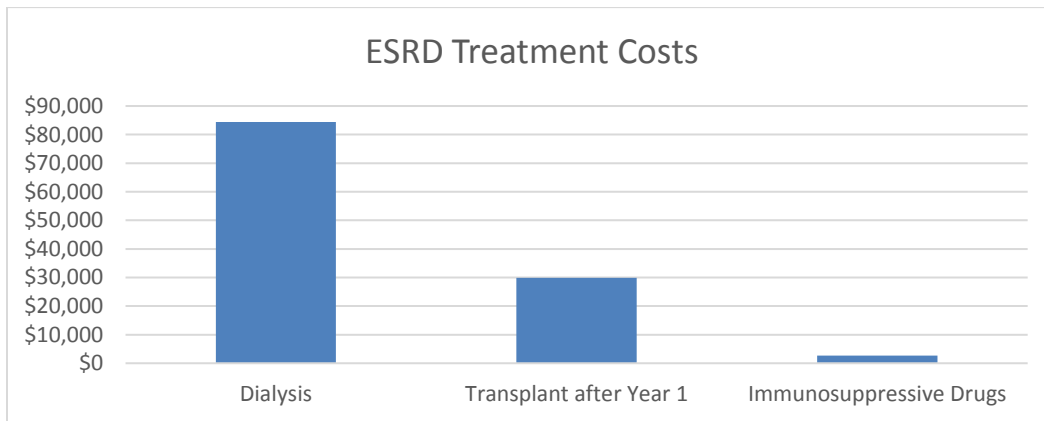


Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act (H.R. 6139)

Issue: Kidney transplant recipients must take immunosuppressive drugs for the life of their transplant, or they increase the risk of losing their kidney. Medicare pays for the transplant and immunosuppressive drugs for 36 months post-transplant, but coverage of these critical medications stops unless the beneficiary is Medicare-aged or Medicare-disabled. As a result, they often face the challenge of finding affordable coverage that allows them to obtain medications required to maintain their new kidney.

Background: The Medicare End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) program pays for dialysis or transplantation for most of the 660,000 kidney disease patients every year regardless of their ages.

Medicare spends an average of \$84,450 per year for an individual who is on dialysis. After the first year of transplant, the cost is much lower at \$29,920 for an individual with a functioning kidney transplant. Of that, immunosuppressive drugs cost Medicare an average of only \$2,683 per year. If the transplant fails, the patient returns to dialysis or receives another transplant, each covered again by Medicare.¹



Extending immunosuppressive coverage beyond the 36-month post-transplant limit would help maintain the transplanted kidney and enable more kidney disease patients who lack adequate insurance to consider transplantation. Most transplant recipients also have a higher quality of life and are more likely to return to work than dialysis patients.

While the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") created new opportunities for individuals with kidney transplants to obtain coverage by preventing pre-existing condition exclusions and requiring qualified health plans sold through the Health Insurance Marketplaces to cover immunosuppressive drugs, some patients are still unable to afford or access coverage in the Marketplaces. This also does not impact group health plans which can still choose not to maintain coverage of immunosuppressive medication. These issues may leave patients without vital access to the medications they need to prevent organ rejection.

Request: The Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act would extend Medicare coverage for immunosuppressive medications indefinitely, ensuring patients have access to these lifesaving medications. All other Medicare coverage would end 36 months after the transplant, similar to current law. The bill also requires that group health plans currently providing coverage of immunosuppressive drugs for kidney transplant recipients maintain this coverage.

¹ USRDS 2015 Annual Report