

# KEEP PATIENTS AT THE CENTER OF HEALTH CARE REFORM

Comprehensive care is a key component of life with Parkinson's disease (PD). Being able to access health services, see a specialist, and pay for medications and treatments isn't just about symptom management; it can impact a person's disease course and quality of life. As Congress works to reform our health care system, patient needs should be the driving force behind any changes. This is critical to providing top-level care and ensuring optimal outcomes.

Please keep these tenets in mind as you consider health care legislation:

## 1 DO NOT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS.

Because every person living with Parkinson's has a pre-existing condition, laws that allow insurers to charge higher premiums based on health status will significantly raise expenses for our community. According to a 2016 study commissioned by The Michael J. Fox Foundation, an individual with Parkinson's spends an estimated \$26,400 a year on their care. That's a lot of money for the average American household, and it underscores the need for affordable, non-discriminatory health coverage that spreads costs across a large, diverse population.

## 2 COVER WIDE-RANGING HEALTH CARE BENEFITS.

People with Parkinson's rely on a broad scope of services to meet their needs, including, but not limited to, access to specialists, physical, occupational and speech therapy, and medications and surgical procedures. Revisions to existing law that reduce the number of benefits a plan must cover will make it more difficult and expensive for individuals to live well. Similarly, current law that says insurers cannot cut off coverage when a patient's medical claims reach a certain limit should be maintained.

## 3 SAFEGUARD MEDICARE AND MEDICAID.

Eighty percent of PD patients rely on Medicare for basic health care needs, and up to one-third of these individuals also are eligible for Medicaid. Changes in law that reduce funding for these programs, restrict benefits or make it less attractive for physicians to care for enrollees will add to the economic burden of Parkinson's.

## 4 PREVENT OLDER AMERICANS' COSTS FROM RISING

As the average age at diagnosis of Parkinson's is around 60, the disease impacts a substantial number of older individuals. The Parkinson's population will see its health care expenses rise if insurers are allowed to charge people in higher age brackets significantly more than younger Americans.

**Accessible, affordable, high-quality coverage is an absolute necessity for people living with Parkinson's disease. It is imperative that Congress keeps patient needs at the forefront of the health care reform process.**

Please contact Ted Thompson at [tthompson@michaeljfox.org](mailto:tthompson@michaeljfox.org) for more information.