

Broken Health Care Promises: Medicare

President Trump's Broken Promise: “I was the first & only potential GOP candidate to state there will be no cuts to Social Security, Medicare & Medicaid.”¹

Trump Administration's Track Record

Despite his explicit and repeated campaign promise not to cut Medicare, Trump has been trying to cut federal support for the program by hundreds of billions of dollars. In his 2020² and 2021³ budgets, Trump proposed devastating cuts to Medicare. For example, in his most recent budget proposal released in February 2020, the president proposes cutting federal support for Medicare by about three-quarters of a trillion dollars between 2021 and 2030.⁴ These cuts include creating barriers to health care access, such as imposing broad requirements that Medicare beneficiaries obtain administrative “prior authorization” to receive services.⁵ Trump's ongoing

efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act also would result in major Medicare cuts, dramatically increasing Medicare out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs and preventive services, among other Medicare cuts.⁶

What makes these proposals even more appalling is that there is no effort to use savings from the Medicare program to improve the program, for example, by ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries get more financial support for their out-of-pocket costs. As shown below, unpaid medical costs are causing significant financial hardship for Medicare beneficiaries with serious illnesses. That is a violation of our societal commitment to seniors and people with disabilities in the Medicare program.

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Problems Reported by Medicare Beneficiaries with Serious Illnesses



One of the most glaring gaps in the Medicare benefit is the lack of oral health coverage. Two-thirds of Medicare beneficiaries, including older adults and people with disabilities, do not have coverage for oral health. Many are forced to pay out-of-pocket for costly and preventable oral health care needs. A 2019 Families USA/YouGov poll found that seven out of 10 likely voters support adding oral health coverage to Medicare. Majority support for adding the benefit was found in both parties and across every age group, race, ethnicity, gender, region, and ideology.⁸

In December, the House of Representatives passed the Lower Drug Costs Now Act with Democratic and some Republican support to allow Medicare negotiation of prescription drugs and to use the savings to pay for improved Medicare benefits, including an oral health benefit, and other significant reductions in Medicare out-of-pocket costs.⁹ Trump and Republican leadership both oppose this legislation for partisan reasons.¹⁰ Unlike the Trump administration's proposed cuts to Medicare, this bill saves money by allowing the government to negotiate for better drug prices and uses the savings to address major gaps in the Medicare benefit, like capping how much seniors have to pay out-of-pocket and providing oral and vision benefits.

Endnotes

- ¹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, May 7, 2015, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/596338364187602944?lang=en>.
- ² Jacob Pramuk, “Trump Pledged to Protect Medicare and Medicaid, but His 2020 Budget Calls for Major Spending Cuts,” CNBC, March 12, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/12/trump-2020-budget-proposes-reduced-medicare-and-medicaid-spending.html>.
- ³ Elena Botella, “What Seniors Need to Know about Trump’s 2021 Federal Budget,” Forbes, February 10, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/elenabotella/2020/02/10/what-seniors-need-to-know-about-trumps-2021-federal-budget/#174c63533842>.
- ⁴ Office of Management and Budget, *A Budget for America’s Future, Fiscal Year 2021* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/budget_fy21.pdf.
- ⁵ Michelle M. Stein, “Verma Says Prior Authorization ‘Indefensible,’ but Budget Proposes More,” Inside Health Policy, February 11, 2020.
- ⁶ National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, “Repeal of the Affordable Care Act Is Devastating to Medicare Beneficiaries,” March 10, 2017, <https://www.ncpssm.org/documents/medicare-policy-papers/repeal-of-the-affordable-care-act-is-devastating-to-medicare-beneficiaries/>.
- ⁷ Michael Anne Kyle et al., “Medicare Beneficiaries with Serious Illnesses Report Problems Paying Bills,” The Commonwealth Fund, November 4, 2019, <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/journal-article/2019/nov/medicare-beneficiaries-serious-illnesses-problems-paying-bills>.
- ⁸ Families USA, “Families USA/YouGov National Poll,” August 26, 2019, <https://familiesusa.org/resources/families-usa-yougov-national-poll/>.
- ⁹ Families USA, “Statement: Led by Speaker Pelosi, the House Passed Landmark Legislation for Reining in High Drug Prices. Will President Trump Stand with Our Nation’s Families and Ensure It Becomes Law?,” December 12, 2019, <https://familiesusa.org/press-releases/statement-led-by-speaker-pelosi-the-house-passed-landmark-legislation-for-reining-in-high-drug-prices-will-president-trump-stand-with-our-nations-families-and-ensure-it-becomes-law/>.
- ¹⁰ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “House Votes to Give the Government the Power to Negotiate Drug Prices,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/12/us/politics/house-prescription-drug-prices.html>.

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