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## **APA Lauds Introduction of Legislation to Repeal Medicare's Part D Exclusion of Coverage of Benzodiazepines**

**Arlington, Va.** – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) thanks the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin (D-3<sup>rd</sup> MD) for introducing legislation to repeal the current law excluding coverage of benzodiazepines from Medicare's new prescription drug benefit. The APA also commends Rep. Jim Ramstad (R-3<sup>rd</sup> MN) for his leadership in becoming the lead cosponsor of the legislation.

"Your legislation is timely and most welcome, and the members of the APA – and most importantly their patients – are deeply grateful for your leadership," said APA President Steven Sharfstein, M.D., in a letter to Rep. Cardin. "We look forward to working with both co-sponsors on quick enactment of this most important bill."

Benzodiazepines are widely used for management of acute anxiety, panic attacks, seizure disorders, and muscle spasms for those suffering with cerebral palsy and other disorders. These medications are especially important for routine medical care in the elderly and disabled populations.

Under the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) enacted in December 2003, benzodiazepines are among several classes of commonly prescribed drugs that will be excluded from coverage under the new Part-D program.

The blanket exclusion of benzodiazepines from coverage under the Part-D program could have serious negative consequences on the physical and mental health of millions of individual Medicare beneficiaries, and inappropriately limits physicians' ability to develop the most appropriate prescription drug regimens for their patients.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidelines clarifying that Medicare drug plans *may* cover benzodiazepines as part of a supplemental coverage option, and that states *may* continue to cover these medications under Medicaid. While this is helpful, these options nonetheless create administrative problems and represent at best, an incomplete solution.

In addition to the APA, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (NAMI) have also publicly indicated their strong support for this legislation.

**About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose nearly 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives. Care that works to get your mind healthy again so you can lead a healthy life. Visit APA at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org) and [www.healthyminds.org](http://www.healthyminds.org).

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