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APA Urges Veto Override for Landmark Medicare Legislation

ARLINGTON, VA – The American Psychiatric Association today joined Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus, D-Mont., and other congressional leaders at a rally to support enactment of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (HR 6331). The House passed the legislation by a 355-59 vote and the Senate followed with a vote of 69-30. The president vetoed the bill earlier today.

In addition to blocking a disastrous 10.6 percent scheduled cut in Medicare payments, H.R. 6331 makes sweeping and historic changes to the way in which Medicare covers mental health services:

Repeal of the 50 percent Coinsurance for Mental Health Care

Section 102 ends the blatant inequality in coinsurance required for all mental health services under Medicare Part B. For over 40 years, the Medicare program has required a 50 percent coinsurance for outpatient psychiatric care, while all other Part B services carry the standard 20 percent coinsurance. H.R. 6331 will ensure that, effective 2014 and beyond, the coinsurance for mental health services is the same 20 percent as for all other Part B services.

Coverage of Benzodiazepines and Barbiturates

Section 175 provides coverage of benzodiazepines and barbiturates, drugs commonly and safely used to manage psychiatric and other health conditions, under Medicare Part D. Without clinical justification, these medications were specifically excluded from the Medicare drug program.

Codification for the Six Classes of Clinical Concern

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services took critical sub-regulatory action to ensure that all or substantially all of certain types of medications commonly used for the treatment of medically vulnerable populations will be available under Part D. The APA strongly supports the codification of this policy into law and would welcome the opportunity to ensure that the provision works as intended.

Taken together, these are the most sweeping changes in Medicare's coverage of treatment for mental illness in 40 years. The APA urges Congress to override the president's veto of H.R. 6331 so that these fundamental changes in Medicare policy can become law.

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About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is the nation's leading medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org