



Coronavirus Response and Older Americans

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Congress enacted three coronavirus assistance packages to provide relief to families and businesses in March, 2020. The first two bills provided money for testing and treatment; vaccine development; paid sick leave and paid Family and Medical leave for workers; increased Medicaid funding to help states provide care; and increased funding for nutrition programs for low-income people. The third bill is the largest in spending and addresses the financial impact of the outbreak by providing money to families, states, hospitals, health care personnel and first responders, and nursing homes as they fight the pandemic.

Assistance for Older Americans

The response bills include provisions that will directly help older Americans including:

Coverage for Coronavirus Testing and Treatment.

Testing for the coronavirus will be covered under Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance if ordered by a doctor. Medicare covers testing under Part B and all co-pays are waived, including physician services. Treatment is covered under Part A, and patients must pay deductible and co-pays. Medicaid covers testing and provider visit at no cost to the beneficiary, and may cover uninsured people.

Out-of-Network Care and Drug Coverage. The out-of-network requirement is waived for coronavirus-related illness under Medicare managed care. All Part D drug plans must provide a 90-day supply of prescription drugs at any pharmacy, including online pharmacies.

Observation Status. During this crisis, if an individual needs to be transferred to a skilled nursing facility after their hospital stay, the observation status rule will not apply and seniors cannot be billed for it.

Telemedicine. Restrictions on telemedicine have been waived during this crisis. Medicare providers can offer telehealth services to all beneficiaries, allowing beneficiaries to receive health services from their doctors over the phone and avoid the risk of exposure to the virus.

Individual payments. Most seniors will automatically receive a payment from the government in the next 3-8 weeks. This includes people receiving Social Security, government, railroad or other pensions and those impacted by windfall elimination provision (WEP) or government pension offset (GPO).

Eligibility will be determined using a person's adjusted gross income -- which includes income from wages, investments, and retirement benefits, including Social Security, government pensions and Railroad Retirement income, and 401(k) and IRA distributions -- from 2019 tax returns, or 2018 tax returns for those who have not filed this year. For people with no tax liability and who have not filed a tax return in either year, the IRS will look at income information in Social Security or Railroad Retirement benefit statements.

- People with no tax liability will receive \$1,200;
- Individuals with incomes up to \$75,000 will receive \$1,200;
- Couples with incomes of up to \$150,000 will receive \$2,400;
- Individuals with incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,000 and couples with incomes between \$150,000 and \$198,000 will get a prorated payment; and
- Seniors who only receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits may be eligible but will have to follow certain procedures to receive payment.

Increased Protection for Nursing Home Residents.

The bill provides \$200 million to assist nursing homes with infection control.

Expanded Unemployment Benefits. Nearly one in five people over 65 are in the paid workforce. The bill includes \$260 billion in additional unemployment benefits to anyone who has lost their full- or part-time jobs due to business closures or stay-at-home orders.

Unemployed workers will receive an extra \$600 a week in addition to their state benefits for four months. So-called “gig” workers who work and who are not “employees” under standard labor law will also get unemployment benefits. Workers who remain unemployed after that period will receive an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits until the end of the year.

More Supplies and Equipment to Medical Workers and Hospitals. Industries will receive \$1 billion to increase production of ventilators and personal protective equipment for the doctors, nurses and other medical personnel on the front lines of the pandemic.

Housing Assistance. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has allotted \$3 billion to assist low-income households with housing payments. This includes \$1.25 billion for Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance for seniors, disabled and low-income working families and \$50 million for Section 202 housing stability and services for low-income seniors.

Help With Heating and Cooling Bills. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has an additional \$900 million to help low-income households pay to heat and cool their homes.

Nutrition Assistance. Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was increased by \$15.5 billion. This will help low-income households, including seniors, pay for food. An additional \$250 million was allocated for the senior nutrition program to provide an additional 25 million home-delivered and pre-packaged meals to low-income seniors who are home-bound and have disabilities or multiple chronic illnesses and their caregivers.