Alliance for Retired Americans FRIDAY ALERT

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Senate Votes Against Terminating the Trump Administration's Medicare AI Prior Authorization Pilot

On Thursday, the U.S. Senate voted against ending the Administration's Medicare AI-prior authorization pilot program, Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction (WISeR), by a 50-46 margin.

See how your Senators voted here.

The resolution, S.J. Res. 198, would have invoked the Congressional Review Act (CRA) in order to halt implementation of the model. The Alliance sent a letter to all senators urging them to vote YES on the measure.

Historically, prior authorization has not been frequently used in traditional Medicare. But the WISeR program, launched in six states in January, replaces patients' and doctors' medical determinations in traditional Medicare with a prior authorization process powered by artificial intelligence (AI) run by for-profit corporations. Corporations are paid a fee based on the number of medical procedures denied, incentivizing them to deny or delay medically necessary care.

Reports from affected states say it is creating serious problems for Medicare beneficiaries and providers. A Washington State Hospital Association survey indicated that patients are waiting two to four times longer for medically necessary procedures because of the program.

A national survey commissioned by the Alliance in April found that using artificial intelligence to make decisions regarding Medicare treatments is broadly unpopular, with 70 percent of those surveyed opposing it and only 20 percent in favor.

"We are deeply disappointed that the Senate failed to act, but we thank the senators who stood with older Americans by voting to end this harmful experiment," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance in a statement. "We will continue working with lawmakers in both parties until Congress puts patients ahead of for-profit corporate contractors and permanently ends the WISeR pilot before it becomes a nationwide barrier to care."

NYT: Social Security Administration Scrambling to Improve Employee Morale as Staffing Reaches Lowest Level Since 1967

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is now trying to contain the fallout from the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) staffing cuts by quietly hiring some new employees, deploying technology, and issuing staff reassignments, according to a report from the *New York Times.*

The DOGE-led cuts resulted in the largest one-year staffing reduction in history for SSA as well as the smallest number of employees working at the agency in 59 years. It also slashed at least 10 percent of workers from each of the nation's 1,200 field offices, increasing workloads for the remaining staff and hampering the ability of the remaining employees to provide timely customer service.

News media also reported this week that SSA Commissioner **Frank Bisignano** has attempted to show appreciation to overworked employees by sending SSA workers chocolate covered pretzels from his daughter's company, Pretzables. But as several groups have pointed out, the attempts have done little to actually boost employee morale and might actually qualify as an ethics violation.

"Older Americans earned their Social Security benefits through a lifetime of hard work," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "If Commissioner Bisignano truly wants SSA to provide timely, reliable service to beneficiaries and honor SSA workers, he should take action to ensure that the agency is fully staffed and all field offices are kept open."

You're Invited: Special Webinar to Stop Medicare Scam Ads and Protect Older Adults from Online Fraud

Meta, the corporation that owns Facebook and Instagram, allowed about $12 million worth of Medicare scam ads to run on its platforms last year. Scam ads accounted for 10 percent of Meta's global revenue in 2024.

Join a special "Stop the Scam" webinar hosted by the Alliance and the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) on **July 22 at 4 PM ET.** CCDH is dedicated to making the internet safer through innovative research, public campaigns and policy advocacy. The organization works to expose online harms, educate the public, and persuade lawmakers to take action.

During the session, CCDH CEO and Founder **Imran Ahmed** will discuss the latest research on how Meta allows scams to proliferate on its platforms. Alliance Legislative Representative **David Simon** will also provide an update on current online scams legislation.

Register here: https://www.mobilize.us/allianceforretiredamericans/event/988833/

As the Older Americans Act Turns 61, Programs for Seniors are Still Under Threat

This Tuesday marked the 61st anniversary of the Older Americans Act (OAA). On July 14, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law. This week, the U.S. Senate unanimously voted to reauthorize the OAA, which provides funding for critical senior services like Meals on Wheels and Medicare State Health Insurance Programs (SHIPs).

Photo: "Senator Daniel K. Inouye, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and others at signing ceremony for the Older Americans Act," *UHM Library Digital Image Collections*

Since returning to office, the Trump Administration has decreased funding for Older Americans Act programs. The Administration's FY2027 budget calls for more decreases, and recommends completely eliminating vital programs for seniors, including the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

"Generations of seniors have received crucial support and services thanks to the Older Americans Act, and lawmakers have a duty to ensure current and future generations continue to benefit," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "Here at the Alliance, our commitment to protecting and strengthening retirement includes safeguarding the OAA."

***KFF Health News:* Facing Funding Losses, States Call Out Big Businesses With Employees on Medicaid**
By Jazmin Orozco Rodriguez

As the Trump administration's January deadline looms for states to enforce new Medicaid work requirements, some state lawmakers are turning the tables by pushing to publicly name the largest companies that have employees enrolled in the government program covering low-income and disabled people.

California lawmakers seek to revive an expired law that would require the state to identify companies that employ 100 or more people and have employees enrolled in Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program. Nevada has had a similar law in place since 2017, though a proposal for one in Oregon stalled when its legislative session ended in March.

The California bill author, Democratic state Sen. Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, said she is deeply troubled by what is going to happen when work requirements kick in. According to the state, nearly 5 million out of more than 14 million residents on Medi-Cal will be subject to the rule.

"We think this is a bill that's about fairness," Smallwood-Cuevas said. "It's a basic principle that taxpayers deserve transparency about which large employers are shifting their healthcare costs onto the public."

Large employers that regularly top Nevada's list, such as Walmart and Amazon, have said that the state included part-time and seasonal workers in their counts and that their full-time hourly employees make too much to qualify for Medicaid.

Read more here.
