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October 24, 2001

The Honorable Max Baucus
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Senate Finance Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We understand that the Senate Finance Committee may be preparing a revised Medicare package to reflect current budgetary limits and congressional priorities. In view of this approach, the undersigned supporters of S. 775, The Geriatric Care Act, ask that you include this measure in your Medicare proposal. Introduced by Senators Blanche Lincoln and Harry Reid and cosponsored by three members of the Finance Committee, this legislation would enhance care for frail Medicare beneficiaries by increasing access to physicians who care for Medicare patients and providing coverage of care coordination and assessment services under the Medicare program.

The Geriatric Care Act would address shortcomings in current law that provide disincentives for physicians to enter and remain in the field of geriatric medicine. The bill would provide a limited exception to the Medicare hospital specific cap on payments for the training of geriatricians, which has led many hospitals to eliminate or reduce their geriatric training programs.

S. 775 also would modernize the Medicare physician fee schedule to acknowledge the importance of geriatric assessment and care coordination in providing health care for seniors and make care coordination and assessment an explicit benefit. This benefit would be available to chronically ill Medicare beneficiaries. It would cover initial and periodic assessments; coordination/referral for medical and other health-related services, including multidisciplinary care conferences, coordination with other providers, and medication management; patient and family caregiver education and counseling; and other activities to facilitate continuity of care and patient adherence to plans of care.

While we encourage the Finance Committee to include S. 775 in its Medicare proposal in its entirety, we urge the committee, at a minimum, to incorporate the bill's provision for an annual screening assessment for elderly beneficiaries into its Medicare package.

Sincerely,

Alzheimer's Association

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine

American Geriatrics Society

Catholic Health Association

Elderplan, Inc.

National Chronic Care Consortium

National Council on the Aging

National PACE Association