

**Arthritis Foundation Statement of Support for
the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003**

The Arthritis Foundation supports the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003 that for the first time would provide coverage for prescription drugs and biologicals for persons with arthritis. While this legislation falls short of the Arthritis Foundation's goal of comprehensive coverage, we believe that it represents an important opportunity to expand access to therapies that help reduce the pain and disability caused by arthritis. We urge Congress to act on this legislation as soon as possible.

The conference agreement includes key provisions that are consistent with the Arthritis Foundation's statement on *Prescription Drug Coverage for Medicare Beneficiaries*, including a voluntary prescription drug benefit that is available to beneficiaries in both fee-for-service and other Medicare options. Overall, persons with arthritis who qualify for Medicare due to age or disability will benefit from prescription drug coverage that provides both up-front coverage and a cap on catastrophic health care costs. The Arthritis Foundation believes this coverage is a good start, and will continue to aggressively advocate for expanded coverage of prescription drugs and biologicals under the program to close significant gaps in coverage that would exist under the new benefit.

The Arthritis Foundation also is pleased that Congress has taken the first step in expanding coverage for self-injectable biological therapies under Medicare to treat diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. The conference report would establish a national demonstration project 90 days after enactment to provide \$500 million in coverage for up to 50,000 beneficiaries. The Arthritis Foundation continues to support coverage for every qualified beneficiary and plans to continue to aggressively advocate for full coverage next year.

The Arthritis Foundation also supports the following elements of the conference report:

- Guaranteed federal "fall-back" to ensure that a drug benefit will be available when private plan options do not exist
- Assistance to help protect low-income beneficiaries

The Arthritis Foundation has reservations about a "premium support" demonstration project that could result in higher premiums for beneficiaries who remain in Medicare fee-for-service. Specifically, we are concerned that this approach could penalize older and sicker persons with multiple chronic diseases like arthritis who would choose to remain in traditional Medicare. The Arthritis Foundation plans to stay actively engaged in implementation to protect persons with arthritis who depend on Medicare for their health care coverage.

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