

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2017

The Honorable Thomas E. Price  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Price,

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and now Maria have wrought historic damage on a number of states as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has declared public health emergencies in areas affected by these hurricanes and have deployed HHS staff to assist in the response. This work is incredibly important and necessary to help address the direct impact of these hurricanes.

At the same time, HHS has additional authority to ensure that Americans affected by Harvey, Irma, and Maria can access critical HHS health care programs. We ask that you use your authority to provide additional leeway for enrollment related choices. Many residents are focused on securing their houses, taking care of elderly neighbors, rebuilding amid flood damage and ensuring access to food, water and necessary treatment and medication. During this period of response and recovery, HHS should allow residents of affected states and territories additional leeway for both of the upcoming enrollment seasons.

**Marketplace Enrollment.** This year's open enrollment season for states using HealthCare.gov is half the length it has been previously. As Americans affected by Harvey, Irma and Maria work to reestablish their lives and move forward under potentially new housing, employment and health needs, we request that you extend open enrollment for HealthCare.gov through January 2018.

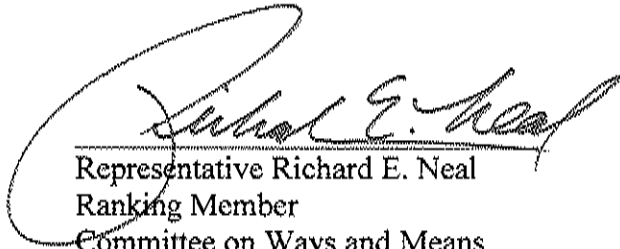
**Medicare Advantage.** Seniors who will either enroll for the first time or potentially switch Medicare Advantage plans likewise should be afforded additional time to enroll or make plan choices. Florida and Puerto Rico in particular are home to many seniors and those recovering from these devastating hurricanes may need additional time to consider Medicare Advantage plan choices. We request that you extend the Medicare Advantage open enrollment season through January 2018.

This additional time will give residents of states affected by these hurricanes time to collect any necessary documentation, seek out assistance in choosing a plan and make informed decisions for 2018 coverage without having to take focus away from time-sensitive recovery efforts. Imposing unnecessarily strict deadlines on individuals and families affected by these historic hurricanes is not only unfair, but may have serious detrimental health and financial consequences in the months and years to come. We believe that it is well within the authority of HHS to grant these extensions.

Medicare Part B and Part D Enrollment. We are also concerned that individuals becoming eligible for Medicare Part B and Part D will miss enrollment deadlines and thus be forced to pay a lifetime of increased premiums as a result. We encourage you to seek options to provide such individuals a special election period and waiver of any premium penalty. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you on this matter. In addition, we request that HHS work with the Social Security Administration to allow flexibility in Part B premium collection and termination due to non-payment of premiums for beneficiaries who do not have premiums deducted from their Social Security checks.

These are commonsense measures that would provide much needed assistance and leeway for Americans affected by the devastating impacts of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. As President Trump said in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, "We are one American family" and "To the people of Texas and Louisiana, we are 100% with you." We share this view fully because this is about coming together to support the American family in moments of great challenge and difficulty. We hope that HHS will afford Americans affected by these storms the necessary understanding and flexibility to ensure that they can both focus on recovery and make informed decisions about their coverage for the year ahead.

Sincerely,



Representative Richard E. Neal  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Ways and Means  
U.S. House of Representatives



Representative Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives