

AARP Throws Support Behind Healthcare Reform

Written by Yamileth Medina

Thursday, 05 November 2009 11:09



The AARP (Association for Advancement of Retired Persons) is the predominant lobbying group for senior citizens in the United States. Healthcare reform is an issue that impacts many seniors today; many are worried that their Medicare or Medicare Advantage benefits will be cut. One of the methods proposed for finding the funding to insure more Americans is to cut Medicare's reimbursements to doctors; this could lead to a decreasing number of practitioners who are willing to accept Medicare. That's why it's surprising that the organization has announced its support for the Democratic healthcare reform bill. Their power (40 million Americans over age 65 are card-carrying members) has the potential to push the House of Representatives' and Senate's bills over the amount of votes needed to pass. As a result, some Republicans have questioned AARP's status as a nonpartisan organization. It must be said, though, that AARP has made enemies of politicians in both parties in the past; and their seeming neutrality gives their views more credibility.

Believe it or not, AARP is actually willing to endanger the business of its own corporate partners. It makes money off of Medicare Advantage plans and other products sold by UnitedHealthcare and other health insurance companies. The reform bill AARP is backing will, above all, see significant cuts to Medicare Advantage. AARP officials insist that the fact that they collect over \$220 million per year from AARP-branded insurance doesn't cause them to have a conflict of interest. Since they appear willing to sacrifice their own profits for what they believe is the greater good, respondents of a recent poll have greater trust in them to recommend the right solutions to our healthcare crisis. A majority of independents and Democrats have more confidence in the AARP than in health insurance companies. Even Republicans are equally confident in the seniors' organization.

Still, the question remains: why would the AARP risk alienating a significant portion of its base? After all, senior citizens have consistently been the demographic least supportive of healthcare reform--largely since they have the most to lose. Maybe the fact that most of the budget cuts will be borne by Medicare Advantage as opposed to standard Medicare itself is expected to soften the blow. The majority of seniors would like to keep Medicare Advantage programs alive, but by no means have those programs been ideal. Many have had issues with government reimbursing the private insurers for this supplemental coverage for years. A case in point is the infamous "donut hole": each year, Medicare Advantage covers a certain level of medical costs until patients have to pay the entire amount out of pocket. Although the Medicare Advantage plan kicks in again after a certain amount (often \$5,000 per year), most policyholders' spending tends to fall slightly under that amount. (Meanwhile, they continue to pay the premiums for their [health insurance plan](#) .)

Congress is scrambling to have a bill passed as soon as possible; the House may even vote on it over the weekend. AARP's eleventh-hour support will boost the chances of reform. A lot of seniors may be vocal when opposing reform, but it isn't fair to assume that the older generation who "already got theirs" and has public [health insurance plans](#) available to them doesn't care

AARP Throws Support Behind Healthcare Reform

Written by Yamileth Medina

Thursday, 05 November 2009 11:09

about the masses of uninsured young people. Some criticism is based in their desire to avoid saddling future generations with massive national debt, while other senior citizens believe that insuring our population is the best way to give back. Either way, seniors have played a major role in the healthcare reform debate.

(Image: [auntjojo](#) under CC 2.0)