

August 21, 2018

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

As the senior Senator from West Virginia, I hear almost every day from seniors who tell me how important Medicare is for their health and economic security. Our seniors – and seniors around this country – depend on Medicare to stay healthy and independent. That is why I am and have always been fighting to keep the Medicare program strong and financially secure, and why I was so disturbed to see recent reports that Medicare's financial situation is worse than previously reported.

In June, the Medicare Boards of Trustees released the 2018 Trustees Report on the financial status of the Hospital Insurance and Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds. The report included the worrying prediction that the Medicare Part A Hospital Insurance trust fund will be insolvent in just eight years – three years sooner than was predicted last year.

Medicare insolvency would be devastating to seniors in my state and around the country. While every senior would suffer, the more than 31,000 West Virginian seniors who live in poverty¹ and already struggle to make ends meet would be left without a lifeline. That is why I am committed to finding a solution to this crisis before seniors are left without access to the care that they need.

Today, I am seeking your help in better understanding the causes driving the insolvency of the Medicare Trust Fund, the impact that insolvency would have on seniors, and the solutions for preserving Medicare. I ask that you provide answers to these specific questions:

1. What factors are contributing to the insolvency of the Medicare Part A Hospital Insurance Trust Fund? What factors shifted the expected insolvency date from 2029 to 2026?
2. What will the impact be on seniors if the trust fund is insolvent? How will it impact their access to the healthcare that they need?
3. In the event of insolvency, what steps can CMS take to protect seniors' access to healthcare?

¹ http://www.wvpolicy.org/new_us_census_data_shows_poverty_remains_a_problem_in_west_virginia

4. What steps can CMS take to avert insolvency?

5. What actions or legislative changes could Congress make to avert insolvency?

Since I came to the Senate, I have always tried to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to push for commonsense solutions to critical problems. While Congress can often get caught up in partisan bickering, this problem is too important to put off or kick down the road. Before Medicare, almost 1 in 2 older Americans had no health insurance and, if they got sick, faced the choice of going without care or facing devastating economic consequences.² We cannot go back to that world. I look forward to working with you to protect and preserve Medicare for generations to come.

With warmest regards,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

² <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/advocacy/info-2017/why-medicare-matters-to-all-americans.html>