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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

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July 28, 2021

Tim Noel  
Chief Executive Officer  
UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement  
Five Centerpointe Drive Suite 600  
Lake Oswego, OR 97035

Dear Mr. Noel,

Last month, Oregon and other areas of the Pacific Northwest experienced extreme heat. The temperature in Portland peaked at 116 degrees Fahrenheit. Because of the heat, over 50 people in Portland died, while more than 100 people across the state also perished. A preliminary report from Multnomah County found that among the people who died none had access to central air conditioning and only one had a working air conditioning unit.

During the extreme heat, community organizations alongside city, county, and state governments worked together admirably to create cooling centers to keep people safe. However, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, it is understandable that many older adults and people with chronic conditions were reluctant to congregate at indoor facilities.

While the June heatwave is past, I worry that there will be more extreme heat events this summer and poor air quality due to wildfires. It will be a benefit to Oregonians everywhere if we take this time to figure out how to be best prepared for the next heatwave that is sure to come.

I authored the CHRONIC Care Act to provide Medicare Advantage (MA) plans with new flexibility to meet the needs of chronically ill members. Under the law, MA plans can offer Special Supplemental Benefits for the Chronically Ill (SSBCI) that are “non-primarily health-related” in order to maintain or improve the health or function of the individual. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services 2021 regulations specifically refer to indoor air quality and equipment and services as an example of non-primarily health related SSBCI benefit. Under the ongoing Public Health Emergency, MA plans have been given the opportunity to file mid-year benefit changes in order to best meet the needs of their members. This means that your plans could update their benefits today to provide air conditioning and air filtration units to its chronically ill members in Oregon.

In light of the ongoing pandemic and extreme weather events, it seems to me that our collective goal should be to keep older adults and people with vulnerable chronic conditions safe at home. I strongly urge your organization to leverage these flexibilities to provide eligible Oregonians with

air conditioning units and air filtration units to do just that. In my view, these items are not extra benefits, but essential benefits that could mean the difference between life or death.

Together, we can help Oregonians get through these events. I look forward to partnering with you to provide essential benefits to Oregonians as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



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Ron Wyden  
Chairman  
Committee on Finance