

Report to New York City Seniors from Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney

JULY 2001

Dear Friends,

In these first few months of this new session of Congress it has become clear what issues will top the congressional agenda: Social Security and health care—including prescription drug coverage and pricing, and a managed-care patients' bill of rights. I've always made these issues a priority, so I'm glad they're coming to the fore now.

In this edition of my newsletter, you will find information of special interest to New York City Seniors: prescription drug pricing, Social Security benefits, improvements to Medicare, the programs and services of the NYC Department for The Aging, and my work investigating nursing home abuses.

It's a unique period in our nation's history: Senator Jeffords' party switch forcing a change of party control in the U.S. Senate, and the razor-thin margin of Republican control in the House of Representatives make every legislative issue hard-fought. With increasing questions about the condition of our economy, these issues are all the more important—and contentious. But despite the historic battles being fought, my goals are the same: meeting the real needs of the people of my district.

It's important to me that federal agencies are appropriately responsive to your needs. If you have applied for a federal benefit and believe your application is not being processed properly, or if you are having any other problems with a federal agency, my district staff may be able to help. Please don't hesitate to call or write me or my staff to ask for assistance. The door to my office is always open to you.

Also, please feel free to share any suggestions and recommendations you may have regarding issues facing our country. Many of my best initiatives originate with ideas brought to me by my constituents. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

**Here's how
to contact me:**

Manhattan:

1651 Third Avenue
Suite 311
New York, NY 10128
212/860-0606

Queens:

28-11 Astoria Blvd.
Astoria, NY 11102
718/932-1804

Washington, D.C. :

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Maloney Fights for Fair Drug Prices

Keenly aware that seniors are being forced to choose between putting food on the table and paying for their medically necessary drugs, I am an original co-sponsor of H.R. 1400, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act of 2001. This proposed

legislation will allow pharmacies that serve Medicare beneficiaries to purchase prescription drugs at the average price that the drugs are sold in other developed nations. The legislation is estimated to reduce prices for brand-name drugs, on average, by 40 percent.

In addition, I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1512, the Medicare Extension of Drugs to Seniors (MEDS) Act of 2001. This bill will provide seniors and the disabled with a comprehensive prescription drug benefit, with seniors paying a 20% on all prescription drugs and a \$24 monthly premium.

"Prescription drug costs are a life and death issue for thousands of American seniors and we cannot just stand by and watch as drug prices skyrocket beyond the reach of seniors precisely in their time of most critical need. On average, America's seniors fill 18 prescriptions each year, and, nationally, spending on prescription medications is increasing 15 percent annually. This Congress must not simply watch prices go out of control for products that only become necessary when seniors are sick and least able to pay," Maloney said.

If you would like to learn more about the studies I commissioned on prescription drugs, please visit our website: <http://www.house.gov/maloney/press/107th/20010404fairness.html>

Social Security: Little Known Facts

I strongly believe that seniors should be able to keep as much of their Social Security benefits as possible. In 1993, as a freshman member of Congress, I was credited by the Washington Post with persuading President Clinton to change his budget to scale back a

tax increase on Social Security. One of my constituents, George Spitz, says this change and a rollback of a proposed utility tax, saved him between \$700 - \$900 a year in taxes. Additionally, last year we were able to eliminate rules that penalized seniors for continuing to work.

Did you know that:

■ Effective with the year 2000, the earnings test for Social Security changed so that beginning with the month you reach full retirement age (65 in year 2000), you can earn unlimited amounts and still receive your full benefits?



Congresswoman Maloney releases study showing that pharmaceutical companies charge substantially more for drugs when they are used by humans than when they are used by animals.

■ If you reach 65 in the year 2001, from January 1 to the month prior to age 65 you can earn up to \$25,000 and receive reduced benefits for those months? (Should you go over the \$25,000 limit, \$1 in benefits will be deducted for each \$3 you earn over the limit. Remember, should you accept benefits prior to age 65, the calculation of your benefits will be reduced by number of months prior to age 65.)

■ In the year 2002, for those months prior to full retirement age the earnings limit will increase from \$25,000 to \$30,000?

For more information, please contact my office or the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or visit: <http://www.ssa.gov>.

Medicare Improvements

For the last several years, Medicare has been a big topic of debate. Thanks to President Clinton's leadership and bipartisan congressional support, the life of the Medicare Trust Fund has been extended. You will be happy to learn that Medicare has

expanded its application of preventive services which will help lower your risk of disease and illness.

For the record, Medicare covers:

- Tests for breast cancer, cervical cancer, vaginal cancer, and colorectal cancer;
- Bone mass measurements;
- Diabetes monitoring and diabetes self-management;
- Flu, pneumonia, and Hepatitis B shot;
- Prostate cancer screening tests.

Though Medicare has made great strides in

including preventive services, improvements to Medicare's preventive care package should be made, including eliminating co-pays and deductibles on these services. Yet, with the state of New York projected to have more than 4 million seniors by 2025, Medicare must continue to be strengthened and modernized for the future.

In addition to supporting increased Medicare coverage, I am proud to have authored and passed a bill that ensures Medicare covers annual mammograms for women. Since then, I have authored H.R. 1809, the Cancer Screening Coverage Act of 2001, which works to expand coverage for everyone to have access to routine cancer screenings (breast and prostate cancers, for example) under private health insurance plans — early detection saves lives.

For more Medicare information, please call 1-800-633-4227 or visit www.medicare.gov.

NYC Dept for the Aging Programs & Services

The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) provides a range of programs and services, tailored to a variety of specific needs, that can help older New Yorkers live more independently and with greater productivity in their later years.

The DFTA administers the City's 335 senior centers, provides a range of programs for the elderly and caregiver families, opens doors to jobs and volunteer work, and acts as an advocate on the local, state and national levels.

The Department, the largest in the nation, is funded by the City, state and federal governments, and through private grants and contributions.

For questions about benefits and services for the elderly, and help with government program applications, call or visit:

Information and Referral Unit
2 Lafayette Street, Sixth Floor
New York, NY 10007
212/442-1000

Office hours: Monday – Friday, 9 am to 5 pm.

Other services provided by the DFTA include:

Elder Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) saves eligible seniors more than half the cost of most prescription drugs. 1-800-332-3742

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) provides financial help with fuel and utilities to income-eligible homeowners and renters. Call 212/442-1000 (this program is open from November 18 - May 15);

If you have general questions, please call the main office at 212/227-2810.

Senior Housing Initiatives Unit works with service providers, the private sector, government agencies and elderly consumers to plan and advocate for housing resources that will meet the changing financial and physical needs and preferences of older New Yorkers. It also provides information on New York City housing options and opportunities. 212/442-1384.

Weatherization Referral And Packaging (WRAP) program helps low-income elderly keep homes warmer in winter and cooler in summer with weatherization and energy-related services. 212/442-3055.

Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program provides rent increase exemptions to eligible tenants. Age 62 and over. 212/442-1000.

Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center helps elderly victims of crime, and also offers prevention counseling, as well as assistance on elder abuse. 212/442-3103.

Reduced Fare issues temporary fare cards to people 65 and over for reduced fare on mass transit and assists with Reduced Fare MetroCard applications. 212/442-1000.

Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) offers free assistance by trained older volunteers to people with questions on health benefits and programs, supplementary health insurance, and long-term care insurance. 212/333-5511.

Other special services provided by the DFTA: Alzheimer's and Long Term Care Services provides counseling and referral services for Alzheimer's families, long term care counseling and referral for families with elderly relatives. Call (212) 442-3091

Grandparent Resource Center addresses the emerging needs of grandparents and other older relatives raising children. Call (212) 442-1111.

Learn more about your medications

If you'd like to learn about your medications, these government publications may be educational:

- *FDA's Tips for Taking Medications;*
- *Drug Interactions: What you Should Know;*
- *Buying Prescription Medicines*

Online: A Consumer Safety Guide;

For your free publications, call toll-free 1-888-878-3256, weekdays 9am - 8pm ET and ask for the "Your Medications" package; or send your name and address to Your Medications, Pueblo, Colorado 81009; or visit www.pueblo.gsa.gov and read or print out these and hundreds of other Federal Consumer Information Center publications.

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Maloney Investigates Lax Nursing Homes

This spring, along with Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) Rep. Maloney announced the release of a Congressional study showing widespread failure in New York State's nursing home inspection and enforcement procedures that aim to

maintain quality and safety standards for all of the state's nursing homes. Condemning the situation, Maloney stated: "New York's Seniors are literally at greater risk of abuse, poor living conditions, and inadequate care because of breakdown in the state review process."

"This report shows that New York State's nursing home enforcement is in need of serious reform. With more than 100,00 seniors at risk, an overhaul of the state inspection system should take place NOW! We have fought in Congress before to stop efforts to repeal federal nursing home standards and we were successful then. Now, we have laws in place but no enforcement occurring at the state level," Maloney said.

"Reports suggest that the Governor supports better inspection and enforcement efforts, and these statements are welcome—but I stand with my colleagues in keeping the pressure on to ensure that nursing home inspection and enforcement procedures are reformed," she continued.

"One of our state's most precious treasures—our seniors—must be kept safe and healthy," Maloney said.

For a copy of the report, visit: http://www.house.gov/maloney/press/107th/nursing_homereport.html

Maloney Legislation of interest to Seniors

In this session of Congress, we are working to improve the lives of Older Americans. Here is a select list of bills that may impact your lives and that I have cosponsored:

H.R. 1400, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act: *This bill*

requires each participating manufacturer of a covered outpatient drug to make it available for purchase by each pharmacy: (1) in an amount equal to the aggregate amount sold or distributed by the pharmacy to Medicare beneficiaries; and (2) at a price no greater than the manufacturer's average foreign price.

H.R. 1512, the Medicare Extension of Drugs to Seniors (MEDS) Act of 2001: *This bill will provide seniors and the disabled with a comprehensive prescription drug benefit, with seniors paying a 20% copay on all prescription drugs and a \$24 monthly premium (never paying more than \$2,000 total for the medications).*

H.R. 526, the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act of 2001: *Providing comprehensive patient protections, this bill amends the Public Health Service Act, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to protect all consumers in employer based health insurance managed care plans and other health coverage.*

H.R. 1255, the Medicare Early Access and Tax Credit Act of 2001: *This bill will provide the opportunity for people between 55 and 64 to access Medicare. It also offers a 50% tax credit, which would make it even more affordable for people age 55 and over to obtain health insurance coverage.*

If you'd like to learn more about these bills, please visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/>