



Bipartisan Senators Introduce the Nutrition CARE Act Companion Legislation to Improve Access to Treatment for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities on Medicare

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 21, 2019) –The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action celebrates the introduction of the bipartisan Senate companion legislation of the Nutrition Counseling Aiding Recovery for Eating Disorders (Nutrition CARE) Act of 2019 led by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH).

Eating disorders affect 3-4% of the senior population and approximately 6% of females and 3% of males with disabilities. Eating disorders for older Americans and Americans with disabilities are particularly serious given the likelihood of co-occurring chronic conditions that further compromises an individual's health and well-being. Despite the prevalence of eating disorders within these populations, Medicare excludes coverage for outpatient nutrition counseling—a core component of comprehensive treatment for eating disorders.

“Eating disorders tend to be discussed in the context of young people, but that misses the full extent of the problem,” **Senator Hassan** said. “My bipartisan bill with Senator Murkowski would help ensure that seniors and people living with disabilities – both populations who often face other health challenges in addition to eating disorders – receive the comprehensive care that they need.”

The Nutrition Counseling Aiding Recovery for Eating Disorders (Nutrition CARE) Act of 2019 ensures that every core component of treatment for eating disorders, including medical nutrition therapy is covered by Medicare. “This is a critical validation for the work that is performed by dietitians who are specialized medical nutrition therapists,” says **Grace Ray Schumacher, President of the Alaska Chapter of the International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals; Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance Board Member; and Representative for the International Federation of Eating Disorder Dietitians.**

“Although eating disorders are often perceived as solely impacting teens and young adults, they also impact aging Americans, which can further complicate existing chronic disorders or diseases. These issues are psychologically rooted, but they can take a serious long-term toll on the body. The Alaska Psychological Association acknowledges that this is among one of Alaska's most pressing mental illness issues, but our state is unfortunately lacking the resources needed for treatment,” said **Senator Murkowski**. “Addressing these complex illnesses cannot be ‘one-size-fits-all.’ Effective treatment requires a comprehensive approach, tailored to fit each unique case that is encountered. For Alaskans that rely on Medicare that are struggling with an eating disorder, this legislation will expand access to medical nutrition therapy, a key component of outpatient treatment which prioritizes customized diets and meal plans based on each patient's physical, dietary, and psychosocial history.”

The Senators join their colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives who support the House version of the Nutrition CARE Act (H.R. 3711) led by **Representatives Judy Chu (D-CA-27)** and **Jackie Walorski (R-IN-02)** and supported by **Representatives Tony Cardenas (D-CA), Kathy Castor (D-FL), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Susie Lee (D-NV), Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Harley Rouda (D-CA), Paul Tonko (D-NY), Don Young (R-AK-AL), Nannette Diaz Barragan (D-CA-44), Chris Collins (R-NY-27), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE-AL), and Ted Deutch (D-FL-22).**

“The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action applauds the leadership of Senators Murkowski and Hassan in leading the Nutrition CARE Act,” says **Chase Bannister, Mdiv, MSW, LCSW,**

CEDS, Board President of the Eating Disorders Coalition. The formal Senate introduction of this critical piece of legislation moves our community on step closer toward making comprehensive coverage for eating disorders treatment a reality for the millions of Americas affected by this illness.”

“I welcome the introduction of the Nutrition Care Act by Senator Hassan because it expands access to medical nutrition therapy for Medicare beneficiaries suffering from eating disorders,” said **Seda Ebrahimi, Ph.D., Founder and Director of the Cambridge Eating Disorder Center, which operates centers in Cambridge, MA and Concord, NH.** “It provides a much-needed component toward the effective treatment of eating disorders in the elderly.”

Eating disorders affect 30 million Americans during their lifetime and have the second highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness, second to opioid abuse. These disorders do not discriminate, and affects people of all genders, ages, sizes, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Eating disorders are complex, biologically-based illnesses that include the specific disorders of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorders as recognized by the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM 5. With interventions at the appropriate durations and levels of care, eating disorders can be successfully treated to recovery.

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States.

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