

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl  
Special Committee on Aging Hearing  
1-800-Medicare: It's Time For a Check-Up  
September 11, 2008**

Good morning. Ranking Member Smith, thank you for holding this hearing. You and your staff launched an investigation into 1-800-MEDICARE nearly four years ago. Considering all your hard work and due diligence, I trust today's hearing will lead to improvements in the government's ability to help seniors get the health care they need.

Customer service is a critical component of navigating the Medicare system: CMS currently estimates that 1-800-MEDICARE will receive 34.5 million phone calls in 2009. Older Americans use the help line to differentiate and decipher the overwhelming number of plan options available, to ask questions about coverage, to switch plans, and to file complaints.

But Ranking Member Smith's investigation shows that, in addition to lengthy wait times and a failure to call participants back when promised, much of the information disseminated by Medicare customer service representatives is incorrect and inconsistent. These can be grave errors. Misinforming Americans about their Medicare coverage can cause them to pay much more out-of-pocket than they should have to, or worse, leave them without the treatment or medications they require.

This Committee works side-by-side with CMS on many issues, and I appreciate the working relationship we have. I hope that we can all learn lessons from today's hearing and continue to improve Medicare for older Americans. I would like to particularly thank the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups for offering their expertise this morning. Thank you once again, Senator Smith, for your leadership on this issue.