

Discussion Draft: COVID-19 Recovery for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act

Sponsored by: U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and U.S. Senator Doug Jones (D-AL)

While some steps have been taken to help protect older adults and people with disabilities from novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the prolonged nature of the pandemic, paired with its potency, requires additional action and investment. The *COVID-19 Recovery for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act* would:

Focus the Social Security Administration (SSA) solely on helping people access critical benefits: The bill would require the SSA temporarily halt activities that may require seniors and people with disabilities to make otherwise unnecessary doctor's visits or other appointments. This would include pausing continuing disability reviews, collection of over overpayments and cessation of benefits due to individuals failing to provide information by specific deadlines. The bill would also prevent SSA from advancing regulations that could make it harder for people to access and retain benefits.

Increase timely access to disability benefits: Millions of people with disabilities rely on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for their economic security, and these programs are even more essential during this pandemic and economic downturn. The bill would expand eligibility for these programs by increasing the extremely low asset and income limits for SSI and increasing the substantial gainful activity limit for SSDI. The bill would also suspend the 5-month waiting period for newly eligible SSDI recipients so they can access benefits immediately, automatically forgive student loan debt for SSDI recipients who have a permanent disability that prevents them from working, and help people with limited resources navigate the application and appeals processes.

Ensure seniors and people with disabilities can enroll in Medicare without delay and afford their health care costs: As of April 30, over 30 million Americans have lost their jobs as a result of the economic downturn brought about by COVID-19, and along with it, many have lost their health insurance. To ease the Medicare enrollment process for those eligible, the bill would close gaps in coverage for people who recently enrolled, create a Part B Special Enrollment Period to promote seamless enrollment and relax burdensome paperwork requirements for new enrollees. The bill would also eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare coverage for new SSDI benefit recipients and expand eligibility for programs to help cover the cost of prescription drugs, doctor's visits and Medicare premiums by eliminating the asset test for these programs.

Eliminate barriers to home and community-based services: The bill would delay the implementation of the Electronic Visit Verification requirement until six months after the end of the national public health emergency in order to eliminate barriers to care in the home and keep people out of congregate settings.

Expand access to shelf-stable food: The bill would allow the 700,000 seniors who receive a food box through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to have the option of contactless pick-up and provide additional funding for to increase the quantity of food in each box to limit how frequently a senior must leave the home.

Help protect seniors from coronavirus-related scams: The bill would provide funding to the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission to educate seniors about coronavirus-related schemes.

Provide coronavirus-related resources in non-English languages: The bill would provide funding to help seniors with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities access COVID-19-related information and benefits.

Maintain access to legal services: In order to maintain continued access to legal services, the bill would provide funding to support senior legal services, including senior legal hotlines.

Cosponsors: Senators Shaheen (D-NH), Van Hollen (D-MD), Harris (D-CA), Menendez (D-NJ), Reed (D-RI), Markey (D-MA) and Blumenthal (D-CT).

Supporters: More than **25 national and state organizations** representing older adults, people with disabilities and home health care workers, among others, support the bill, including:

1. Alliance for Aging Research
2. Alliance for Retired Americans
3. Alzheimer's Association
4. Alzheimer's Impact Movement
5. AMDA: The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine
6. American Association on Health and Disability
7. Association of People Supporting Employment First
8. Association of University Centers on Disabilities
9. Brain Injury Association of America
10. Freedom CIL
11. Global Down Syndrome Foundation
12. Justice in Aging
13. Lakeshore Foundation
14. Latino Hispanic American Community Center
15. Lutheran Services in America
16. National Association of Senior Legal Hotlines
17. National Caucus and Center on Black Aging
18. National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association
19. National Hispanic Council on Aging
20. National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives
21. North Central PA ADAPT
22. PA ADAPT
23. Pennsylvania Council on Independent Living
24. Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council
25. SeniorLAW Center
26. Social Security Works
27. The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh
28. The Gerontological Society of America