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July 23, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Doggett
Health Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Doggett:

On behalf of the Patient Access Network (PAN) Foundation and the patients and families we assist, I write in support of H.R. 4311, the *Medicare Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act*. PAN lauds your leadership in reintroducing this important legislation for seniors. Adding dental, vision, and hearing benefits to Medicare is long overdue.

Founded in 2004, PAN is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help underinsured people with life-threatening, chronic, and rare diseases get the medications and treatments their physicians prescribe by providing financial assistance for out-of-pocket costs and advocating for improved access and affordability. PAN provides patients with assistance through nearly 70 disease-specific programs and collaborates with national organizations to provide patients with education and support services. Since 2004, nearly one million underinsured patients have received financial assistance from the Foundation.

As you know, since its implementation in 1965, Medicare has excluded coverage for routine dental care, hearing aids and related audiology services, and routine eye exams and eyeglasses, despite the large numbers of older Americans who need such items and services. Older adults who do not get the dental, hearing, and vision services they need, or who have to delay needed treatment because of cost, are at greater risk for avoidable emergency department visits, hospitalizations, skilled nursing facility visits, falls, isolation, depression, dementia, and greater dependence on family caregivers.

The need for dental, hearing, and vision coverage is great. Almost two-thirds of Medicare beneficiaries, or nearly 37 million people, do not have dental coverage and many forego dental visits due to cost. Nearly half of people older than age 75 and one-third of those ages 65 to 74 have hearing loss, but only one in four Americans diagnosed with hearing issues uses a hearing aid, with cost being the major barrier to obtaining them. And 92% of Medicare beneficiaries use eyeglasses but are without coverage for eyecare.

The PAN Foundation appreciates your leadership in seeking solutions to increase access to and affordability of health care for more Americans. We look forward to working with you to ensure the *Medicare Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act* becomes law. If you would like further information or have questions, please contact Amy Niles, Executive Vice President at aniles@panfoundation.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Klein".

Dan Klein, MHS
President and Chief Executive Officer