

Medicare Maladies

A Series that Exposes the Dangerous Elements of the Medicare Bill currently in Committee

MM #57: Live Long And Squander Medicare

A new report from the National Center for Health Statistics offers some good and bad news for the future of Medicare.

First, the good news: We're living longer than ever before. Overall life expectancy in the United States in 2001 was 77.2 years, according the center, which is part of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's an increase of nearly four months from 2000—and nine years greater than the life expectancy in 1950.

That's quite an achievement—and Medicare could claim part of the credit for it. Since it began in 1965, the Great Society program has helped millions of seniors so they can have “dignity in their later years,” as President Johnson said when he signed Medicare into law.

That brings us to the bad news: Costs are rising for the financially-strapped Medicare program partially because people are living longer. In 1965, Medicare had a projected annual cost of \$10 billion. The annual cost today? \$244 billion.

And the number of seniors in this country is expected to increase as 77 million baby boomers enter their 60s this decade.

You don't have to be demographic expert to see that Medicare needs have serious reform now—and the life expectancy of quality care will be cut short.

Read how to make Medicare ready for the 21st century at heritage.org.

For more information or to receive an e-mail version of “Medicare Maladies,” contact medicaremaladies@heritage.org or call Heritage Media Services at (202) 675-1761.

(“Medicare Maladies” is a regular feature, launched 7/14/03, from The Heritage Foundation. Sad to say, there's another malady coming your way tomorrow. Daily “maladies” are also available on heritage.org.)